

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GENERAL'S SPADE-GUINEA.

IT is one of the terrible experiences of life, when, our whole nature being strung up to receive and endure a shock from one direction, a sharp and ringing blow falls upon us from quite another quarter.

Whatever Maria Vivian had been expecting, on that sweet slumbrous afternoon at Dering Court, it was certainly not that carefully driven chaise, slowly advancing up the avenue, with the led horse behind it. She knew at once that some sudden evil had befallen her uncle, the General. She recognised the man who was driving the chaise. It was Webster, their ex-footman, who had married a former maid of her own, and was landlord of that hostel, the Knight's Arms, at which she had thought it likely her uncle would take lunch.

"O, Webster!" cried Maria, with white lips, as she ran out, and the man touched his hat to her. She could only stand aside with clasped hands on the great flight of steps, while the servants lifted out the unconscious form of the master of the house, and bore him gently into it.

"The General lunched at our inn, Miss Maria" Webster said, "and my wife would have it there was something coming over him then. She told me so when he went away. But I thought it was only her fancies. About an hour after that, a lad came running to say he was lying on the Dering Road, insensible. And off we set at once, and there he was. We didn't lose any time, Miss Maria."

"I'm sure you would not, Webster," she said, with the gracious sweetness that was natural to her.

Dr. Palmer had been sent for, and in the meantime, Mrs. Vivian and her experienced female servants did their best for the sick man's comfort and well-being. Only they could not restore him to consciousness. He lay with half-closed eyes, moaning heavily.

Whatever she felt, Mrs. Vivian refused to show any alarm. "Men of the General's age often have these seizures," she observed to Maria. "He must never ride alone again. And let George be telegraphed for at once. When your uncle revives he is sure to ask for him."

Edgar undertook this duty. He could not be thankful enough that he had not worried his uncle with his own difficulties. Yet those difficulties were imminent. His one hope lay in Allan Grale's fulfilment of his promise of aid. As he went by the lodge of the Court on his way to the telegraph office, he paused to direct that if Mr. Allan Grale or any messenger from him should appear on the scene during his absence, he should be requested to await his return.

Poor Maria found herself quite at a discount in the sick room. There was nothing she could do. She could only sit still, and gaze mistily at the toilet table, on which some attendant had laid the watch and chain that had been removed from the General's prostrate form.

There was the little gold pencil case, for which she had saved up her youthful shillings, proud of the dainty gift she had at last laid in her uncle's hand. But something suddenly aroused Maria's attention.

The watch-chain had attached to it a large gold ring, over which was slipped the smaller rings of several little ornaments. One of these smaller rings now hung twisted and vacant. Its appendage had clearly been wrenched from it!

Maria took up the chain and eagerly examined it. What was missing? There was her childish gift, the pencil case; there was the familiar locket containing his wife's portrait, and the hair of their one baby who had died in early infancy; there was the General's much-valued compass; there was a small seal. What was missing was a spade guinea. About this spade guinea there hung a little tale.

During a brief visit to London made by the Vivian family many years before, George Vivian had picked this coin from the grass in one of the parks. He was quite a little lad, and thinking it to be a pretty gew gaw, he had played with it for a whole day before it was observed and its value noted. It was duly advertised. But though three or four claimants responded, none of them could give an accurate description, and one or two of undoubted character, to whom it was shown, distinctly disclaimed it. So George retained possession of it, and on his uncle's next birthday, when his brother and sister were ready with their little offerings, he bethought him of this, and got up quite a pretty speech about rendering "treasure trove" to the lord of the manor. The General had been delighted. Somehow, the whole thing had seemed to him like a good omen, and he had often since adverted to it. Mrs. Vivian had said that it appeared to her more like a sign that Nephew George would get a good character for generosity at very little cost to himself.

And now, how had this spade guinea got lost? Had it happened

by accident in her uncle's fall? Or had it been wrenched from him while he lay insensible?

How vexed the General would be about it! And, in connexion with his old happy superstition concerning it, she could not suppress a feeling of uneasiness in herself. Its loss (just now, too,) seemed like an evil omen for George.

That is the worst of accepting auspicious signs. Their reverse is forced upon us. It is few who have the happy philosophy to accept those, and yet resolutely ignore these.

Was it not possible that it might be recovered? Surely it might be lying in the road where the General had fallen, and possibly it was trampled down by the feet of those who had come to his succour. Maria had desired Webster not to leave the Court: she could ascertain from him the exact spot where the accident had taken place.

As she went downstairs, she had a curious fancy, which is a common enough experience with those who are in an exalted nervous state. It seemed to her as if she had lived through all this before—even down to this little detail of the missing pendant—and that nothing but a curious cloud on her memory prevented her from recovering the whole course of events, and knowing what would have to happen next. Surely she must have dreamed of this last night! Yes, yes, she had. For one instant, it almost seemed as if she had it all in her grasp, but it was only as one might see a wide expanse of country revealed by a flash of lightning; another second, and all was obscurity.

Webster was standing where she had left him—on the terrace outside, near his horse and chaise. Maria put her question.

"Midway on the road between this and the 'Knight's Arms,' ma'am," he answered promptly. "Rather nearer this than that."

"But can you tell exactly whereabouts it was?" she inquired again. "Did not you notice the precise spot?"

Webster looked at her a little wonderingly. "Well, miss," he said, "I was so taken up with the sight of my poor master, that I can't say I noticed just exactly. He was lying on that bit of road at the back of the trees of the Dark Pool."

Maria was silent. Yes, it was so! Directly she heard it, she felt she had known this, too, before. The Dark Pool had been in her last night's dream. But also, there had been something more about the Pool than this, and what that something was still escaped her.

"It's a very quiet part of the road, that, Miss Maria. No houses near. My wife always says she feels a kind of shiver in going along it; as if something bad had happened there once, or is to happen there, someday. It was a kind of providence that a stranger was coming along just there and saw the General, for he sent us word, if he did no more."

"What stranger?" asked Maria.

Webster shook his head. "I can't tell you, ma'am. It was little

Joe Ward who brought the news to us. Joe said a strange gentleman had met him in the road, who told him General Vivian was lying in a fit a little further on, and bade him run to the 'Knight's Arms' for help. We made sure this gentleman had gone back to the General, and that we'd find him with him when we got there; but there was no sign of him. It seemed queer."

"Perhaps he had gone off in another direction for more help," suggested Maria, "or was pressed for time and could not wait. A stranger, did the boy say?"

"That's what Joe called him, 'a strange gentleman.' But he could hardly have been quite a stranger, or how would he have known the General's name, and the sign of the Knight's Arms?"

Maria hesitated whether to tell Webster about the missing pendant, but she decided that she would not for the present. Webster was a worthy man, but sensitive and easily offended, and there was no knowing how he might take it.

Most likely it would be found on the spot, trodden down into the ground, so as not to be conspicuous to any casual observer. There were no thieves likely to be lurking in sweet Dering lanes, and the ornaments which remained safe were worth much more than the lost trifle. She herself would take an early opportunity of going to the place, and quietly searching for it. It actually seemed to her that in that elusive dream, after which her memory vainly grasped, there was something lost, which was found again when it seemed least likely, and that both the loss and the finding were in someway connected with the Dark Pool.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. GRALE'S BASKET.

THAT day things had been going on more happily than usual at Moorland House. Poor Mrs. Grale's world was ever brighter when her son was at home. Allan might not be always very dutifully attentive, but he always spoke kindly to his mother; he never jarred her nerves as his father did, or snubbed her after Mary Anne's fashion. And now he really seemed to have returned from this holiday at his very best. She was sure that his father would be gratified by Allan's early attendance on business that morning (she knew nothing of the trouble at the works), and much as she longed for a chat with her boy, she noted with pleasure that he did not return home till the luncheon hour. Possibly it was this new devotion to duty which made Allan, during that meal, rather more silent and pre-occupied than was his wont. But when it was over he showed no signs of hurrying back. Mary Anne went away to pursue some of her own devices, and Mrs. Grale pulled her knitting from her work-bag, and, with her son lingering beside her, felt herself a happy woman.

"And so you found your way to Savoch, Alny," she said, calling him by the pet name she had given him when an infant. "I did not ask you about it when you mentioned it, for your father was present, and it might have put him out. I really don't think he noticed what you said. It's hard that he should feel as he does about my poor sister and her husband. Whatever disgrace has fallen, it is not their fault; and it doesn't touch us; it's nothing to your father or me. Why can't he let bygones be bygones? I suppose there is nothing fresh, is there, Alny?"

"Nothing fresh at Savoch," he replied. The remembrance of the house there, and the life lived in it, rose upon his mind like a vision, not of sleeping beauty and hope, but of sleeping anguish and shame. His face was very grave.

"And how is my sister Marget looking?" asked Mrs. Grale again.

"Pretty well for her, I think," said Allan, hesitatingly. "She seemed in good health. But her days must be very dull, mother, with no companion but that grim husband of hers."

"Ah, she knows what made him grim," answered Mrs. Grale, feelingly. "They've both had the same burden to bear, Alny, and indeed that's the only comfort they've had. I suppose she had no news to tell you, my dear?"

"Nothing at all: it isn't likely," he replied. There was a strange constraint in his manner.

"Was the name not even mentioned?" Mrs. Grale asked again, in a lower voice.

"Not once," replied Allan, briefly. His aunt's worn, craving face, rose before him, with those questioning eyes to which he had refused response. It hurt Allan to remember this. He could realise what an event his visit must have been in the Savoch house, what wild hopes and wishes it must have awakened, and to the disappointment they had been doomed. And yet—what could he have said?

Mrs. Grale shook her head sadly. "I'll engage it was not out of your Aunt Marget's thoughts for one minute," she remarked. "Well, we all have our trials—but oh, Alny, hers has been a heavy one."

He bent his head in sympathy.

And the never knowing when the worst may have to be gone over again must be the bitterest bit of all," went on Mrs. Grale. "One can live through anything if it's to come to an end. There's no safe cupboard for family skeletons except the one with the green door, and the stone in front of it. And perhaps poor Marget's misery is over; only as she does not know it, it is the same to her as if it were not. There was a story about a death once, you know, Alny, but proofs could never be had. She wouldn't believe it without them."

"Ah, she would not want to believe it! she'd rather there might be another chance, cost her what it might," said Allan. There was a quiver of emotion in his voice, which made his mother look up from her work, and her heart warmed the more to her son for showing so

much fellow-feeling on a certain family trouble which she never dared even to mention to Mr. Grale or Mary Anne.

"Well,—well,—well," she sighed. "Poor Marget and I haven't shared life fairly between us. She has had all the hard work and hard fare, and one name on a grave, and one name that isn't anywhere! And yet she was always the best of us two sisters, though not counted the best looking; and Mr. Gibson was known to be so good and clever when she married him, a man sure to get on. But he did not. And there's me with a carriage of my own, and children that I may well be proud of."

Allan sprang rather suddenly from his seat near his mother, crossed the room, and stood looking out of the window.

"I've got nothing more to wish for, my dear, except to see you and Mary Anne both well married," pursued Mrs. Grale, after wiping a tear from her eye. "And there was a time when I thought you and Miss Vivian quite understood each other, Alny. But perhaps it's as well it wasn't so, if Mr. George Vivian is looking Mary Anne's way, which seems likely. For I don't believe in families being too much muddled up together."

A brief silence ensued. Then Allan spoke with a change of voice, and an entire change of subject. "Mother, how is old Nurse Kate?"

This was an ancient servant of the Grale family, now living in a cottage situated between Moorland Hall and Dering Court. She was not a pensioner on the Grales, having savings of her own, but Mrs. Grale was in the habit of showing her many little attentions.

"Why; what put her into your head?" asked Mrs. Grale, thinking that this dear son of hers was indeed growing very considerate. "O, Nurse Kate is quite well. I haven't been to her cottage since we came from the country—but she was up here the other day."

"Well, as I should enjoy a stroll this lovely afternoon," said Allan, "I think I'll go to see her."

"You'll make her a proud and happy woman, if you do, Alny. You were always her favourite."

"But I must take her something," he said.

"Take her anything you like, dear," rejoined his mother. "I promised her some cuttings for her garden. You can get them from the gardener. But don't take them: tell her you are sending them."

"No, I'll take them myself," returned Allan. "Politeness of that kind is the best part of a gift." He hated himself as he said this, knowing there was double-dealing in his own mind.

"Well, you can take your choice of the hampers you'll find in the store closet," said Mrs. Grale. "I've got in some new ones, and I have had 'G' painted on them, so that when I send them about I may be sure of getting my own new ones returned, instead of other people's old ones. I think you'll find one or two small enough."

"I won't take a very small one," said Allan. "I must take the old lady a bouncing gift: and young Grale of Moorland Hall and the

Works can't compromise his dignity by carrying a hamper," he added laughingly. "That's the sort of thing peers do, to prove their undoubted superiority to conventional public opinion."

Mrs. Grale smiled. She liked a speech of this kind. It opened possibilities for her own free and easy ways among her bran-new grandeur. But the fear of Mary Anne was always before her eyes.

"Well, do as you like, Alny. You needn't bring the hamper back. There would be nothing polite in that. Tell nurse to return it at her own convenience."

Allan's movements in arranging this little gift for the old servant might be regarded as somewhat peculiar. First, he went to the store-closet, and sought among the hampers for something which he did not find; one of the older hampers, not impressed with this brand of 'G.' But there was none. His choice fell on a hamper which seemed rather strong and large for the carrying of mere cuttings. It had a lid, and its handle was fixed in the middle of this lid. Next Allan went to the greenhouse, and made a careless and not very liberal selection of flowers and roots. He dropped these into the hamper, and then, instead of starting straightway for his walk, he carried the hamper upstairs to his own room, spread a newspaper on the floor, and emptied its contents thereon. Next he unlocked his wardrobe and took from one of its shelves a box of Oriental workmanship. This he deposited carefully at the bottom of the basket, which he then filled up again with his flowery spoil, and left the house. Glancing at the parlour window, he saw his mother watching him. She smiled and nodded pleasantly, thinking to herself that he was a son of whom any mother might well be—oh, so proud!

Between Moorland Hall and Nurse Kate's cottage, Allan passed only two or three rustic children. He found Nurse Kate full of the disaster which had befallen General Vivian, word of which had reached her just before Allan's arrival. This was the first Allan had heard of the General's illness, and it rather staggered him. Had poor Edgar's unlucky position somehow leaked out, and thus upset the old man?

"If you've been so good as to bring me all the pretty flowers with your very own hands," said the grateful old nurse, "at any rate, you shan't drag back that basket, Master Allan. Leave it with me. Its weight, when it's empty, will be nothing even to a poor old body like I am getting."

"Then it must be still more trifling for a strong young body like me," returned Allan.

He did not say that the basket was not yet empty, that it had another cargo to unload, not there, but at Dering Court. He knew that curiosity was one of the old dame's paramount qualities, and that what she was not fully told, she would certainly set herself to find out. It struck her as a curious thing that Allan should persist in carrying away the basket; she was shrewd enough to feel that he must have some reason for it, and she was on the alert at once.

As Allan wished her good-bye, and left the cottage by the front door, she whisked out at the back one. By standing on a bench in a nook of the garden, she commanded full view of the road and of Allan.

"He is not going home," she muttered to herself. "He is going the other way. He has something in that basket, and I wonder what it is. Not cuttings for somebody else, or he'd have said so. Now what is it that he's after? I'd like to know. But well—there—young gentlemen will be young gentlemen, and he was my own darling nursling. Bless him!"

As Allan was pursuing his way towards Dering Court, he saw Edgar Vivian hastening on, far ahead of him. Edgar was on his return from despatching the telegram to George, recalling him to the Court. He hurried after him as fast as possible, and gained on him at last, especially when Edgar paused at the Lodge to inquire if anything had been seen of young Mr. Grale. Edgar had not gone many yards up the avenue before he heard the clang of the gate, and turning, saw that the eagerly expected visitor had arrived.

He stood still; Allan came on swiftly; and they turned aside from the path, where their interview might be interrupted, and halted together among the trees.

"So you have come yourself, Grale," said Edgar, "and oh! you can't think how glad I am to see you! My uncle has had some sort of fit while he was out riding, and is lying unconscious."

"I am very sorry. Have just heard of it as I came along."

"Look here, Grale, I can never be too thankful that I had not been bothering him about my affairs."

"I won't linger here to hinder you at such a time, old friend. See, I have managed your little business," added Allan, as he took from his pocket a sealed envelope. "I could not have delivered that to anybody but yourself, Edgar. There's a fifty-pound note inside. I thought you might like that better than a cheque."

"How good of you!" exclaimed Edgar Vivian, gratefully. "But I'll not begin to thank you now. Without this help what should I have done? There would have been no hope anywhere."

"And this is the box you promised to keep for me," continued Allan, opening the basket, and waving off thanks by his own matter-of-fact manner. "I thought I'd better bring that up myself too. It is such an awkward thing to carry that I put it into this basket, which has the advantage of a handle."

Edgar took it into his hands—an Oriental box, coloured black, with straggling yellow devices over it. There was a faint perfume about it. Often in after days, when mystery and trouble had set in, did Edgar Vivian seem to catch a waft of that soft, indefinite odour.

"I won't detain you one moment longer," said Allan, who indeed seemed in nervous haste. "You will not find it very troublesome to just stow that away in some safe place at once, will you?" he inquired, with some solicitude.

"I'll go straight to the house and do so instantly," answered Edgar, who was holding the box in his hands. It was not at all heavy. "Don't trouble yourself about the hamper. Leave it where it lies, and as you go past the gate-house, tell the lodge-keeper to send his boy for it, and to see that it goes back to Moorland Hall. But need you go off at once?" he added hastily, suddenly recalling his sister's expressed wish to see Allan when he came, though she might not care to see him in the general distress. "Won't you come up to the house, and hear what the Doctor says? A friend's face will reassure poor Maria."

"No, no," dissented Allan Grale quickly, whether to the general invitation or to the last particular assertion it was hard to say. "I'll not come in now—I'll send up to inquire in the evening, and I hope all will be fairly well by then."

Edgar shook his head doubtfully.

"Anything more about young Carr?" he asked.

"Not that I know of. I have not been to the Works since the morning."

"Wait a moment, Grale. I wish you'd come in. Maria was saying that she had not seen you for a long time."

Allan's face flushed.

"When did she say that?" he asked in a low voice.

"Only this afternoon—before this happened to my uncle."

"Did you tell her anything about Charlie Carr?" said Allan, who was looking not at Edgar, but another way.

Edgar Vivian felt this question awkward. Perhaps he had been a little rash in his confidences.

"I had to tell her there was something not quite right," he said, "because she wanted to go calling on the Palmers. Was I wrong in saying so much? You may trust Maria to keep a secret, when telling it would be to anybody's disadvantage."

"I know that!" replied Allan, with a strange, flashing fervency. "Well, you need not tell her that box belongs to me, for you remember what I told you this morning—that it might set her thinking of her own letters. And I don't want to have to give them back, or to pain her with any reflection on the subject."

"She shall know nothing about it," Edgar cordially assured him. He took it for granted there had been some lovers' quarrel between this young man and his sister, which time would put straight.

Shaking hands with each other, Allan went off, trailing the hamper behind him, and nodding acquiescence to Edgar's called-out injunction to be sure and leave it with the lodge-keeper. Allan Grale did no such thing. When he was out in the open road, he carried the basket with him for some distance, then threw it over a hedge into a plantation, and leaping over a gate close by, sought about for a very thick growth of bracken, under which he carefully concealed the hamper.

"I'll come for it in a day or two," he said to himself. "It will be easy saying then that I looked in at Nurse Kate's, and finding it still there, brought it away to save the old woman the trouble."

He gave a low bitter laugh as he went on. He knew well enough that nothing but the exaggerated torment and trouble weighing down his own mind could make him see fears on every hand, convert trifling molehills into mountains, and be ready to do or say any earthly thing that might serve as a plea of excuse to disarm suspicion.

He was in the very act of leaping back into the highway, when a gig rattled up, taking Doctor Palmer to the Court. It all happened so quickly that there was no time for salutation, scarcely for recognition. But Dr. Palmer said to the groom, "Why! isn't that young Grale?"

And the groom replied, "Yes, sir, it was."

Edgar Vivian was just descending from stowing Allan's box safely away in his own sanctum, when the doctor arrived at the Court. The invalid had not regained consciousness. As Dr. Palmer bent over him, he suddenly opened his eyes, looked the doctor full in the face, and spoke in a muttered tone:

"Why! isn't that young Grale?"

This echo of almost the last words he himself had used, naturally startled Dr. Palmer. Could there be anything, then, in that theory of thought-reading, which he was rather inclined to ridicule? and was it possible that a mind, made vacant by disease or circumstance, might reflect any idea that flitted before it—just as a blank pane of glass will, under some conditions, serve as a mirror? This was no time for theory, but he stored the fact in his memory.

Mrs. Vivian, not catching his words, asked what they were. The upper servant in attendance replied simply, "No sense at all, ma'am, just wandering." And he had at once relapsed into unconsciousness again.

Edgar followed his old friend from the sick room. "Is the case serious, Doctor?" he questioned.

"There is no immediate danger," was the reply. "I don't think anything need be apprehended for a few days."

"A few days!" echoed Edgar. He had not allowed himself to think of any danger so imminent as that.

Dr. Palmer shook his head. "The General has an unfortunate temperament for this kind of attack," he said. "He is an excitable, irascible man, and the least agitation will suffice to bring on another fit."

They found Webster at his horse's head, preparing to drive back to the Knight's Arms. "Did the General seem at all annoyed when he was at your house this morning?" asked the medical man.

Webster touched his hat. "My wife said he was absent like, troubled, but I noticed nothing myself, sir," he answered.

"He was alone?" questioned the Doctor again.

"Yes, sir. He told us that Mr. Bird, the architect, who had been with him, had gone across the country on special business."

"And did he speak as if anything had vexed him over the building matters?" continued the Doctor.

"He did not say a word about them, sir."

"Can you recall any remark he made of any kind?"

Webster pondered. "Yes, sir," he said at last. "The General asked if we knew any stranger in the neighbourhood—a woman in a yellow cloak. We told him we did not; and then he said that he thought she must be somebody a little out of her mind. I don't remember anything else, sir."

"Little enough," returned the Doctor. "Well, we must hope for the best."

"Are all well at your place?" asked Edgar of Dr. Palmer, who was thinking of Charles Carr.

"They were all well when I left this morning," answered the Doctor, cheerily. "I haven't been in my own house since nine o'clock. A doctor has a hard life, with but little leisure for domestic amenities. Good-bye, Edgar, you'll see me again very soon; and I hope to find a change for the better," he added, as he drove away.

Edgar Vivian found his sister standing at the back of the hall. She did not say a word—did not ask one question: but she looked in his face, and then putting her hand through his arm, she laid her head on his shoulder and began to cry quietly.

"O come, sissy, this will never do," said Edgar as brightly as he could. "We shall have you ill, next."

"We have none of us been really good to my uncle," sobbed Maria.

Edgar was silent for a moment. "You, at least, have nothing to blame yourself for," he said, gently.

"You don't know," she answered, looking up, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I know he has been often sadly puzzled and troubled about me. But indeed, indeed, I could not help it!"

Edgar thought he knew what she was thinking about. "You must not look at things thus," he said. "It was but natural my uncle should wish to see his favourite, his dear little girl, well settled in life. Yet he is the last man who would force anyone's inclination."

Maria looked aside and said, "You will remember to let me know when Allan Grale comes this evening—don't forget that."

"Why, he has been here and has gone again," answered Edgar, wondering. "I did ask him to stay; I said you wanted to see him. Though, indeed, I didn't really think you would care to do so now in the midst of this trouble."

"Is there no trouble about Charles Carr?" she asked in low, reproachful tones. "I—I"—she spoke with hesitation—"thought Allan might have told me the particulars."

"Not much trouble, I fancy," replied Edgar: "the Doctor has

heard nothing yet. I expect that will prove to be a regular mare's nest. I suppose you would like to beg Allan's good offices for him with his father, but I don't know that he could do much. When that old gentleman takes a will of his own, he listens to nobody. Allan will do his best for Charles, I am certain, without your good word, Maria. I have excellent reasons for knowing that he is a thoroughly kind-hearted fellow."

"Do not praise Allan Grale to me," she returned, with something as near sternness as was possible to her gentle nature.

"Once you liked to hear his praises," observed Edgar, looking at her keenly. He wondered what the break between them was. This sister of his was as much a puzzle to Edgar just now as she had been to the General.

"That she and Allan have not ceased to care for each other, I am convinced of," was Edgar's mental decision. "They are as much in love as ever. What can it be? It seems more serious than an ordinary lovers' quarrel. Surely all will come right yet!"

That same evening, before sunset, Maria found an opportunity to steal away to the place on the Dering road, which Webster had indicated as the scene of her uncle's accident. She had no difficulty in finding the exact spot. The wayside flowers and grass lay as they had been crushed by the weight of the General's form. She could see the marks of his horse's hoofs, and the footprints of the good folk who had come to his succour.

But she did not find the missing spade-guinea, though she sought for it long and patiently.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MANUSCRIPT.

It is impossible to describe Dr. Palmer's indignation when he reached home and learned all that had happened since he left it. Charles Carr had not been there; he was still detained in the counting-house at the Works; and between his prolonged absence, and the coming of one or two messengers from old Mr. Grale, Lettice and Agnes Palmer were reduced to a state of bewilderment.

Dr. Palmer hurried at once to Mr. Grale's counting-house and demanded to see the master. He found old Grale stubbornly mysterious, asserting that Charles Carr knew well enough with what he was charged: while young Carr steadily asserted that he did not in the least understand what the matter was at all.

Mr. Grale produced the facsimile envelopes and stamps which had been found in Charles's desk, and laid them down before Dr. Palmer, without a word, but with significant emphasis. At the sight of these, despite his anger, the Doctor laughed. He told Mr. Grale that everybody knew Charles Carr was clever in that way; that he had

given some specimens of this skill to both Mrs. Grale and Miss Vivian, for their stalls at the Dering library bazaar. Then old Grale fell back on the roll of paper which Charlie withheld from his scrutiny. Charles volunteered instantly to show it to the Doctor, who glanced hastily at it, and assured the manufacturer that there was nothing suspicious about it, that it did not concern his business, and was not even written on his paper. Dr. Palmer took formal possession of this document, promising Mr. Grale that it should not pass out of his own hands, and that it should be produced whenever he chose to formulate his accusation. He could scarcely restrain a smile as he entered into this solemn agreement. Then he insisted that Charles should be released from his durance and return with him. Mr. Grale offered no opposition : he knew he had already exceeded his rights.

Though the Doctor tried to carry off the matter lightly to Mr. Grale, as if it could be worthy of no other treatment, yet he went home feeling vexed and embittered. Mr. Grale had said that he had been subjected to a system of robbery lately, not only in the counting-house but at his bankers', and it could be only someone in that counting-house, as he believed, who had pursued it. Upon none of the clerks did, or could, suspicion rest, except Carr.

Dr. Palmer knew the world well enough to know what a suspicion of this kind is, and how little can be done to combat it. If an orphan lad, like Charles Carr, were driven to seek redress against one so powerful as Mr. Grale, he might succeed or he might fail, but the world at large would only remember that he was somehow mixed up with a disagreeable charge of dishonesty. Yet should Carr decide to let Mr. Grale's injustice pass, the world would believe that the rich man had extended a gracious clemency to his youth and loneliness.

But, after all, Dr. Palmer was a sunny-hearted man, one of those who have such a keen enjoyment of life, and so elastic a faith in goodness everywhere, that the shadows of earth's perpetual suffering, however darkly they fall, pass swiftly over their heads.

Therefore, next morning, when he was awakened by a fresh breeze blowing through his casement, and bearing in the perfume of dewy flowers and the sweet song of blackbirds nested in the great trees of his garden, he again felt soothed and peaceful. There must not be "peace at any price,"—no ; and yet, "as much as in you lieth, live at peace with all men," is an apostolic injunction. Peace and neighbourly happiness were surely worth some sacrifice, and might not the sacrifice be, after all, only of a little worthless pride and injured feeling ?

He went at once to Charles's room, and knocked at the door. It was still very early, but the young man said "Come in."

Charles, up and dressed, was seated by the open window ; but the sweet scents and sounds of early morning had evidently failed to tranquillize him.

"Well, Charlie," said the Doctor kindly, "how are you? Head

ache, I see ! We must not allow ourselves to be too much disturbed by this foolish blunder of Mr. Grale's, you know. We must even remember that he is an elderly man and you are a very young one, and we must regard his surveillance and suspicion from this point of view."

"I know that I was only admitted to his counting-house by his special kindness," admitted Charles. "I remembered that. But that does not make this more easy to bear."

"Certainly not," said the Doctor, sympathetically. "Only I am not sure whether we were wise not to show that roll of paper at once. Why not ? It was that, I imagine, which chiefly angered him."

There was a moment's silence. Then Charles spoke in a strangely significant tone.

"Have you read it through yet, yourself, sir ?"

"No, Charles," he said kindly. "I have been thinking more about the writer than about his writings. I only glanced at it enough to see that you had been trying your hand at a work of fiction."

Another pause. Then in the same low voice, Charles remarked : "If it is shown to Mr. Grale, he may choose to read it carefully, I should like you to read it first, sir."

"Very well, my boy," said the Doctor, "I'll do as you wish. And, trust me, I won't make any move without telling you first."

The young man's face was turned towards the garden. He did not respond to the Doctor's promise by either word or glance.

Dr. Palmer went back to his own chamber, feeling that he did not altogether understand the young man's manner this morning. The mysterious roll of papers which had so excited Mr. Grale, lay on the toilet table, where Dr. Palmer had put it the night before. It consisted of five or six sheets of common foolscap, closely written over. Its heading was simply :—

"Mark Bedell."

The Doctor began to read it in rather an absent sort of way. But as he went on, the expression of his face changed ; it grew grave, and yet with that strange gravity in which a tear and a smile lie very near each other. It was a tale of silent and hapless love, and it ended at the hero's grave.

At one point, the Doctor dropped the paper, and spoke :

"Ah, the secret slips out plainly there ! I wonder if he ever noticed that he actually wrote the real names—Charles Carr and Lettice Palmer ? And Charlie tells his tale well. I have heard it said that every man can write one story ! "

And when the perusal was over, the Doctor slipped the sheets once more into their little elastic band, saying to himself :—

"Poor fellow ! poor fellow ! And so this is the difficulty, is it ? and this is his solution thereof. I wonder if my lassie dreams anything of all this. I don't believe it. And I suppose this is my fault—if her mother had lived, she would have foreseen this and guarded

against it. And yet—why? Carr is a good fellow, with plenty of brain, if only he were not so frail! An early widowhood would be a sad fate for Lettice. And yet again—far better is a widowed existence than a widowed heart."

And the Doctor thought of his own long, faithful loneliness, and how there was no bliss in the world for which he would exchange the memory of his few short years of married life.

But he had no time for reverie. He could hear the voices of his daughters on their way down to the breakfast-room.

"I must speak to Charlie again as I pass his room," he decided. "He has really shown a chivalric spirit over this matter. I daresay he expects I shall be angry, and is waiting in fear and trembling. Well, it won't do to encourage him. Besides, how can I?—when I don't know what Lettice may think about the matter. What cue can I take? I'll make believe not to see anything particular in the paper. Only I'll assure him I've read it through—every word!"

"Well, Charlie!" he said, as he again entered the still shady room where the young man sat in pain, motionless as death. "I've read it through, and I think it's a very pretty story and very well written. Only why didn't you make it end well? There is nothing in it that you need be ashamed of. I don't profess to be a judge in literature, so you must only take my opinion for what it is worth. I never dreamed of your having talents and tastes of this kind."

Charles uttered not one word.

"I shan't show this at once to Mr. Grale," the Doctor went on. "I think it would be really giving way to him too much. I will tell him that I have read it, and what it is—if he wants more than that, he proves that he mistrusts me as much as he does you, Charlie."

As he descended the stairs he could see his pretty breakfast table, with its blue service—of which Mrs. Vivian had characteristically remarked that it was wonderful what pretty patterns were now used in common china—and its glass bowl filled with marguerites.

"I'm afraid you've not had a much better night than poor Charlie himself, girls," he said, when he noted his daughters' sad faces. "He is not fit to stir, and you must send him up his breakfast and keep the house quiet. You young things take life so hardly. As you grow older, you'll accept troubles like rainy days, as being all in the course of the seasons and necessary for the development of things."

"I don't believe injustice and falsehood are ever necessary or can be good for anybody," said Agnes Palmer, rather indignantly.

"But take care that you never call mere fear and enquiry by those hard names, Agnes," said her father. "Nobody will be more sorry than Mr. Grale when he is once convinced of his mistakes."

"He will have to be convinced," she returned.

"I mean to convince him, Agnes. He has been too hasty; especially in his suspicions about a roll of paper he found in Charlie's desk."

"We have heard of that mysterious roll," said Agnes. "What is really in it, papa?"

"My dear girl," said Dr. Palmer, "it is not exactly any business of ours. I should never have seen it, but that Charlie felt he must confide in somebody when Mr. Grale accused him. Therefore I must treat it precisely as I treat my professional business."

The Doctor's daughters knew the full significance of this phrase. They had been trained to have so jealous a regard for professional honour and etiquette, that Agnes used to say that they must often seem to ignore the palpable sicknesses and sufferings of their neighbours. They both took their father's hint, and dropped the subject. The Doctor usually rose promptly from table, but this morning he lingered over the newspaper. He did not wish to go up to the Mill counting-house until Mr. Grale was quite sure to be there.

Agnes went off about her accustomed household duties, but Lettice kept her seat. Her father stole one or two glances at her over his paper. She sat gazing through the open window, but was evidently seeing sad visions of her own, rather than the fair features of the rich valley which stretched below Dering.

Suddenly the Doctor folded his paper with a brisk rustle. "I should think Mr. Grale must be there by this time," he said, rising.

Lettice rose too and came round the table and stood beside her father. She put her hand through his arm.

"Well," said the Doctor, turning to his daughter with more than his usual kindness of tone and manner, "well, and what is my Lettice wanting now?"

Lettice did not speak. She wound herself round in front of her father, and raising her other hand to his shoulder drew down his head.

"What is she wanting?" said the Doctor, with a quaint affectation of intense curiosity, which had a genuine wistfulness in it.

She nestled her head on his shoulder. "You will try to clear up things for Charlie," she whispered. "I know you will."

"Trust me, my dear," said her father.

"But the things must be made right," she said, suddenly rising from her caressing attitude. "Nothing must be merely passed over. Forgiveness is the direst injury when we want only justice."

"Trust me," said the Doctor again. Once more the little brown head dropped, and there came forth soft tones of child-like deprecation. "You're not angry with me for saying so much, papa?"

"Angry!" echoed the Doctor. "What have I done that my little girl should suspect me of being an ogre? Only, you think you care for Charlie more than I do—is that it?"

The tone was jesting, but had Lettice looked into her father's face, she would have seen how grave it was.

"I know you always care for everybody, papa," she whispered.

"And you only sometimes care for somebody, you mean?"

"I want things to be made really right, so that Charles can be happy here again, as he always has been," Lettice said. "Yesterday evening he spoke about having to go away. It would be dreadful!"

"Yes, yes," assented the Doctor. "It is sad to go away against one's will. It is quite different when all is happy and one goes of one's own choice."

"It would never be Charles's choice to go away from you," asserted Lettice, fearlessly, looking up with innocent sweet eyes.

The Doctor gave a short laugh, lifted her caressing hands from his arms and put them back, as it were, into her own keeping.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said. "I should not be very much surprised if you do the same yourself, in due time."

He moved away out of the room. But as he crossed the threshold, he looked round. Lettice stood where he had left her: her face was crimson and her eyes were full of tears. Her father turned back, and caught her in his arms.

"Cheer up, little woman!" he cried; "and trust me I'll do as much for Charlie as if—as if he was my own son!"

"I have never felt anything else," said Agnes, entering the room at that moment, and catching only the last words. "I am sure he has always been like a dear kind brother to me."

The Doctor rushed away. "I suppose I'm an old fool," he whispered to himself. "I suppose I have said exactly those things which ought not to have been said. I know Mrs. Vivian would tell me so, and so would Miss Grale. Hang Mrs. Vivian and Miss Grale!"

With which ungallant sentiment the Doctor hurried on his way. Upon presenting himself at the door of the counting-house, he was met by the prim old clerk, Mr. Wilton.

"O, it's you, Dr. Palmer," he said. "Come in, come in; I'm glad you've called, sir."

"I've called to see Mr. Grale, Wilton."

"Yes, sir, no doubt. Take a seat."

"And I intend to see him, Wilton; and to find out what all this nonsensical accusation means."

"Mr. Grale's away," said Wilton with a jerk, as if the worst had still to come out, and he rather feared the consequences. "Mr. Grale had a telegram from Manchester last night, and he went off by the first train this morning."

Dr. Palmer looked too angry to speak.

"His instructions to me were that things must stand as they are until he comes back; and that Mr. Carr—please understand, Dr. Palmer, that I am only carrying out the master's orders," the old clerk broke off to say—"that Mr. Carr is not to enter the counting-house until his return; but his salary will go on all the same —"

"He will neither enter the counting-house nor will his salary go on," was the indignant interruption.

"They were the master's orders to me, sir, and I can only carry them out," repeated the little man deprecatingly, seeing the wrath in Dr. Palmer's face.

"This is much too bad!" cried the Doctor. "He has no right to go away like this!"

"Sir," pleaded Mr. Wilton, "it's a matter of business in Manchester that may be worth thousands to him."

"Are Charles Carr's feelings and fair fame of no moment?" asked Dr. Palmer. "To go away like this, after raising this mysterious and groundless accusation against this young man, is a most cruel—"

"No accusation has been made yet," interrupted Mr. Wilton, "he said there would be time enough for that when he came home."

"Time enough!" echoed the angry Doctor. "Too much time! What are your important telegrams and your thousands of pounds compared with human hearts and human health!"

"Mr. Grale has to look after his own interests," urged the bewildered Wilton. "A man of business, sir, must attend to his business."

"And when, pray, will Mr. Grale return?"

"We don't know," coldly answered Wilton. "He'll stay till his business is done, and then come back quite suddenly. That's his way."

"Well, Wilton," said the Doctor, "pardon me for speaking so sharply, but the sharpness isn't for you, remember; it is for Mr. Grale. He must suspect and accuse as he chooses, but let him take heed that he may be doing it at his peril."

"I don't want to defend the master's ways of doing things," said the old clerk. "And I've no doubts about Mr. Carr myself. But the master has grounds for his suspicions, there's no denying that, and it is small wonder if he entertains them. I had to agree with Mr. Grale that what he told me in confidence looked bad—but I also said it might admit of explanation."

"And what did he tell you in confidence?" chafed Dr. Palmer.

"Well, sir, I can tell you in confidence the same thing," said poor old Wilton, who was a man of peace and did not like strife. "It was the *name* of the man, seeing it where he did, that upset Mr. Grale; 'Mark Bedell.' Did you ever hear it?"

Dr. Palmer stared at him for a second and then smiled. "Oh, yes, I know all about him, Wilton," he answered.

This time it was Wilton's turn to stare. "If you can lay your hands on him," he said with a significant pause, "why then some of the difficulty would be over."

"I can't do that," said Dr. Palmer. "The man is a myth; he never existed except in name."

"A man must be pretty real, and pretty much alive, too, before he can draw bills and cheques," said Mr. Wilton solemnly.

"Oh—" ejaculated the Doctor, now completely at sea.

"That's it, sir: Mark Bedell, or a man using his name, is the person

who has been committing these frauds on Mr. Grale and has got his money."

"Wilton, I cannot understand you," said the Doctor after a bewildered pause; "what is it you mean?"

"I mean that the person who has been drawing bills on Mr. Grale and put them into circulation and obtained the money for them; and who has drawn out cheques to himself—Mr. Grale's cheques, and signed them with Mr. Grale's name—and got them cashed over the counter at the bankers', is Mark Bedell."

Dr. Palmer could not speak at first for astonishment.

"Who is Mark Bedell? where is he to be found?" he said at last.

"That is what we would like to get at," was Wilton's answer. "Mr. Grale thinks he has a clue now, because he saw the name in Mr. Carr's desk, in Mr. Carr's handwriting, and with that exception he has never seen it but on the bills and the cheques."

"Why could he not have said this to Mr. Carr?"

"Well, sir, it strikes me that the question might rather lie the other way. Why did not Mr. Carr explain what he meant by having that name in his desk—and why did he refuse to allow the master to inspect the roll of paper on which he saw it?"

"He shall see it, he shall see it," cried the Doctor eagerly, "when he returns. I give you my word of honour, Wilton, that nothing can be more innocent than that roll of paper."

"I quite believe you, Doctor, and I shall believe in Mr. Carr until he is proved guilty—and I can't think that will ever be. But you must see that Mr. Grale had grounds for suspecting the young man."

"I do see," assented Dr. Palmer, speaking from the depths of puzzled thought. "This matter seems to me very mysterious. When will Mr. Grale be back?"

"Sir, I have already told you that it is impossible to say. The very day that his business in Manchester is over; rely upon that. Not but that I think it likely he will take the opportunity of his absence to make enquiry into this other business," added the clerk.

"Well, good day to you, Wilton," said the Doctor, holding out his hand. "Of course, I shall not say anything of this, except to Charles Carr. Who takes the lead here in Mr. Grale's place?"

"I do, subject in general things to Mr. Allan," replied Mr. Wilton. "Good morning, Doctor."

As Dr. Palmer crossed the courtyard, full of perplexed thought over what he had heard, a breeze, freshening rather suddenly, began to blow. It set the dust whirling, and made the Doctor say to himself that the autumn leaves had come. It blew something right against the Doctor's face, which then fluttered down and settled on his arm. It was a triangular shred of paper, a fragment of some note which had been crumpled and torn up. He looked at it, as it lay on his sleeve. There were only two words on it, and these words had been evidently on different lines, and one was "reduced" and the other "spade."

The Doctor turned the paper over. No writing was on the other side, only a monogram; the monogram of the Carstow Gentlemen's Cricket Club.

"Dear me!" he mused, "is some young local dandy threatening those whom it may concern that he will be 'reduced' to take a 'spade?' The best thing for him, in all likelihood!"

Then he shook off the fragment and thought no more about it.

"There is certainly some mystery about this Mark Bedell," he said, returning to his own musings. "It seems scarcely likely that Charles would take a real name and put it bodily into that poor little fiction of his. But I don't blame Grale as I did before I knew this."

CHAPTER XII.

BEWARE!

CHARLES CARR seemed as bewildered as Dr. Palmer himself, when he heard of Mr. Wilton's extraordinary statement about "Mark Bedell." Of one thing he declared himself positive: that he had taken the name from no real person, though he could give no better reason for his choosing it than that "it came into his head." He had thought first of giving another christian name, but had finally decided on "Mark." He could tell no more, because he had no more to tell. For the present, things had to be left at this.

And then day after day went by for a week or two, and still Mr. Grale did not return, and Charles was doomed to wear out slow hours of restless leisure.

At Dering Court, too, things went on in a dismal monotony of their own. The Doctors came and went. The wife, the nephews, and the niece, were in devoted attendance on the General, save that two or three times, George Vivian, who looked pale, and seemed absent-minded, took a hurried journey to London. The invalid had regained consciousness and memory, except as regarded the circumstances of his seizure. On that his mind was a perfect blank. He could recall nothing after his leaving the "Knight's Arms." He had not yet had another attack; but the medical men said one was always imminent, and that the least excitement might suffice to bring it on. Evidently George Vivian did not like that opinion, and sighed over it.

Every morning a servant came from Moorland House to enquire after the General's health, and twice since Mr. Grale's absence Mrs. Grale and Mary Anne had ordered their carriage in the same direction, taking up some offering from their viney. Only Allan Grale had never put in an appearance at the Court since that afternoon of the General's seizure, when he had brought up the Oriental box for Edgar Vivian's keeping. George imagined, judging from his own feelings, that young Grale shrank from the sad associations of sickness and impending death; while Edgar thought him a strange fellow, whose

undoubted kindness—for Allan was kind—might choose to take refuge under apparent indifference. Maria had not again expressed a wish to see Allan: possibly, as she heard nothing further about it, she thought the trouble about Charles Carr might have ended.

But Maria felt inwardly restless. She walked out often, choosing generally the way that led to the Mill and to Moorland House. It might be that she was hoping to meet Allan Grale.

It was on one of these rambles, one Monday afternoon, when all things seemed dull at home—Edgar low spirited and George away in London—that Maria saw the Grale carriage at the door of Nurse Kate's cottage. Both the ladies had evidently alighted and gone in, for Mrs. Grale's wrapper and Mary Anne's parasol were lying on the vacant seat. Maria went on, towards the Palmers', thinking that whatever might be the Grales' shortcomings they were not remiss in their attentions to old dependants.

In reality Mrs. Grale's present visit to the nurse had grown out of that visit of Allan's, when he carried the old woman some flowers as a screen to his disposal of the Oriental box. This afternoon Mrs. Grale had discovered that she had come to the end of her hampers. She had sent out several lately, and somehow the boxes and baskets had not been returned so quickly as usual. Mrs. Grale's wealth, if it had made her simplicity vulgar, at least had not so demoralised her as to render her careless of small economies. Her daughter might sniff at her mother's thrift in packthread, and precise reckonings of jam-pots, but Mrs. Grale was not to be misled from her old habits. So when she saw the empty hamper-closet, she, remembering that one had gone to Nurse Kate's, directed her afternoon drive to the nurse's cottage.

It was a wonder that Mary Anne Grale chose to alight at the old servant's. But it was a windy afternoon, with a good deal of dust flying, and as she knew her mother often indulged in a long chat, Mary Anne consulted her own comfort by going in also.

The old woman eagerly welcomed them, pouring out thanks for all the nice things Mr. Allan had brought her that past day. "I thought shame of not coming up to thank you, ma'am," she said, "but my ankle's been uncommon bad."

"I thought as much, Kate," said Mrs. Grale. "Only I want my basket. We will just take it back ourselves, in the carriage."

"The basket, ma'am?" echoed the nurse. She was a little old woman, in a capacious lilac apron, with a withered-apple sort of face set in a broad cap-frilling, and an expression of mingled infantine innocence and witch-like cunning.

"Yes, the basket," repeated Mrs. Grale. "You've not forgotten it, I suppose. A good fresh hamper, one of the new sort; square, with a flat lid, and a handle in the middle of it."

"Aye, I mind it," said the old woman. "But Mr. Allan did not leave it here, ma'am; he took it away with him. I was real vexed

that he did, but he would have his own way. I think he had something in it that he was taking somewhere else."

"He had nothing in it from me," returned Mrs. Grale. "I expect he just brought it away to save you trouble, Kate, and then set it down anywhere instead of putting it back in its right place."

They chatted for a while, and then drove home. There they found a few letters lying on the hall table awaiting them. One was for Allan. Mary Anne did not know the writing, but she casually took it up and looked at it. The envelope bore the stamped seal of the Carstow Cricket Club, of which Allan was a member. "Only some circular or notice from the club," thought she, carelessly.

How could she imagine that Allan might have a correspondent whom he kept regularly supplied with these innocent-looking envelopes of the club? Allan might be in a strait just now, but somebody else was in it also, and their communications with one another had to be jealously guarded from suspicion. That such ways are not the ways of wisdom or of pleasantness, and do not lead to peace, might have been seen on Allan's face had anybody been watching him when he took up that harmless-looking letter. But he thrust it into his pocket; it could only be read in the solitude of his own room.

At dinner Mrs. Grale forgot all about the basket, her attention having been turned to other things; but in the evening, when her thoughts reverted to their usual domestic grooves, she remembered it.

"Where is that hamper you took to old Kate's, Alny?" she asked suddenly.

Allan started from a gloomy reverie. He had meant to fetch that hamper from its singular hiding place before this, but somehow had not yet done it. Nurse Kate's cottage was so near the Court, that going there might mean encountering Miss Vivian—and Maria, the one woman in all the world whom he had ever loved, was now the one woman whom he shrank from holding an interview with.

"I'll see that you get the hamper to-morrow, mother," he said.

"Tell me where you've put it," persisted Mrs. Grale, "or you'll forget all about it, and I shall never see it again. Kate says you took it away."

Allan gave a light laugh. "Well, I know I did," he admitted. "I called in at one or two places afterwards—so I can't tell quite certainly where it is, but you shall have it again, never fear."

"That's the way things get lost," said Mrs. Grale, plaintively. "And our name is not on it—only a G, which might as well stand for Gordon at the shop, or for Gray the station-master. The sooner you look after it, the better."

"I'll go at once," said Allan, rising with alacrity. He felt suddenly uneasy about that hamper. Suppose somebody else found it among the ferns, and suppose it found its way back thence to his mother? How should he explain its being there?

"I did not mean that you need be in quite such a hurry," observed

the mother, "but if you want a walk, you may as well have an errand."

It was twilight when he started on this quest. It occurred to him that he was little likely to meet Maria Vivian at that hour. That letter with the Carstow Club seal lay in his pocket like a weight of burning lead. When he got home, he would have to write a certain note—a short note—but it would take him some time to do!

Maria had called at Dr. Palmer's that afternoon, and found nobody there but himself. He had insisted on her coming in, saying that his young folks would return very shortly.

She was not sorry for a quiet talk with the good Doctor. The anxieties which her uncle had confided to her, immediately before his illness, had taken root in her mind, and were springing up abundantly. She was not happy about either of her brothers. Edgar, whose confidant she had been, was now writing and receiving many letters of which he told her nothing. But her chief anxiety concerned George. He looked worn and troubled, and a singular absent-mindedness kept him continually making strange omissions or mistakes. After the first day or two of his uncle's illness, he had ventured to leave him for a visit to London; latterly, he had been going there nearly every other day, though he certainly did not stay long. He always seemed a little more cheerful before he started, and he always came back very weary and depressed. Once or twice, he had spoken of the weary burden of conventionality, and of that sweet simplicity of life which men banish far from their ways, and then profess to admire at a distance. It was as if his mind's eye was being drawn away from all that he had hitherto held dear—as if he felt some change or doom was hanging over him. Maria noted all this, and a rather curious dread had seized upon her.

She feared that this cherished brother, hitherto so open and light hearted, might be suspecting himself to be the victim of some insidious, perhaps deadly, malady, whose progress he was trying to combat and check in secret. She knew George was not considered strong; anxiety had often been entertained for him. Edgar had always the best of health, but George had been often ailing.

Maria could not speak fully of her thoughts and fears to even so old and trusted a friend as Dr. Palmer. Yet there was comfort in his cheery presence: and, as he had promised, his young people were not long in returning. They came in, flushed with their exertions in sun and breeze. Maria looked a little pale as she shook hands with Charles Carr. No word had ever passed between her and the Palmers concerning the breach with old Mr. Grale, and this was her first meeting with Charlie since it had happened.

"Look what we have found!" said Agnes, gaily, taking from Charlie's hand a fresh looking basket with a flat top and a handle in the centre. They had evidently promptly utilised their trover, for it was now full of ferns.

"Where did you find that?" asked the Doctor. "It makes a great show beside Letty's cracked old vasculum."

"I always said you should get me something new in that line, papa," she retorted, "and now, you see, the fates have done your duty for you. But I suppose we must make due inquiries after the owner of this very pretty thing."

"You have not yet told us where you found it," persisted the Doctor.

"That is the queer part," said Agnes. "It was in the woods of the Camp, not very far from the lodge of Dering Court."

"Yes," said Lettice, "I was stooping to cut out a rich cushion of moss, when I saw the yellow wicker basket show from under the heavy fronds of bracken."

"And then we were afraid to open it," laughed Agnes. "So Charles kicked it over, and said it was very light, and then the lid came open, and we saw there was nothing inside."

"Well," said the Doctor, "it's quite true that one may come across awkward finds in such a way—perhaps the first step to the unearthing and discovery of some terrible crime."

"But scarcely in such a place as Dering, papa," dissented Lettice, who believed her native village to be a kind of modern Eden.

"This was harmless enough, at any rate," said Agnes. "But who could have thought of hiding an empty basket?"

"And a new basket, too," remarked Maria. "Does not that look like a G upon it?"

"Yes, it is a G," answered Charles. "It may belong to the Grales."

"No, the Grales' hampers are of the lumbering old-fashioned sort, and their name is always stamped in full inside the lids," said Agnes. "But I'm sure whoever put the basket there intended to hide it."

The ferns and basket were carried away, and nothing more was said or thought about them. After tea, Dr. Palmer set off to walk to the Court with Maria. They took the lower road, leading past the Church, and had not gone many yards, when Webster, of the "Knight's Arms," drove up in his chaise. He had been taking down a passenger for the evening train. Touching his hat, he pulled up to enquire after the General.

He was told that his old master had been getting better for some little time now; had recovered consciousness, and in a degree, memory, except so far as the period of his attack was concerned.

"He recollects leaving your place, Webster," said Dr. Palmer. "For he says he ought to have taken your wife's advice and rested a little longer—those were the last words she said to him as he mounted his horse. All beyond that is quite a blank."

"It's queer," remarked Webster, "that we've never heard who the gentleman was that first came across the General after the accident. As I said to you, ma'am, at the time, it didn't seem like a stranger,

because of his knowing the General's name, and the sign of my house, and the like. And yet, if he was anybody belonging to the neighbourhood, it seems odd that he does not come forward. Nobody appears to have seen him but the boy, Joe Ward, and he is pretty new to the place, and doesn't know residents from visitors."

"It is certainly singular," observed Dr. Palmer. "The General's memory of the matter may return some day with a flash, and then he will tell us all about it."

Maria thought of the lost spade-guinea. It had never been found or heard of. That also seemed singular.

Webster added a bit of news before he drove away.

"Mr. Grale's back to-night at last," he said. "And he must have come in quite unexpected, for there was no carriage to meet him. That's his way in general: he likes to drop on his people unawares," laughed Webster. And, touching his hat again, the host of the "Knight's Arms" drove off.

Dr. Palmer and Maria walked on in silence. For Webster's remarks had furnished each of them with food for private meditation. A turn of the road brought them face to face with Mrs. Massey, that village widow who had once sought Maria's advice as to taking in a strange lodger.

She stopped them with a deep curtsey. Her business was urgent. She was on her way to fetch the Doctor to the woodman's house in Dering Camp, where a sick baby had just been seized with convulsions.

"I can walk fast," said sympathetic Maria to Dr. Palmer. "Our roads will lie together for a little while, and when we part I shall not be very far from the Court, and it will not be dark, only twilight."

Certainly the Doctor could not have allowed a mere matter of gallant attention to divert him from his duty in a combat between life and death, but he liked the quiet way in which Miss Vivian settled it. They walked forward quickly, and Mrs. Massey kept beside them.

"And how are you getting on with your new inmate?" Maria asked her. For she knew that the stranger was lodging at the widow's.

"Well, so-so, ma'am, thank you," said Mrs. Massey. "She gives very little trouble; and she's away as much as she's at home."

"What is her name?" asked Maria.

"She calls herself Jane West," answered Mrs. Massey, with a caution which clearly betrayed mistrust. "And she pays her rent in advance."

"Then what are you uneasy about?" asked Dr. Palmer.

Maria saw that the widow was embarrassed, and came good-naturedly to the rescue. "Mrs. Massey thinks there is something strange about her, I believe; something more than meets the eye."

"Well, I can't get it out of my mind that it is so," acknowledged the widow.

"Do you know where she comes from?" inquired Dr. Palmer.

"She has wrote to me once or twice from London and dates her

letters from Philpot Street, Stepney. But she didn't say if that is her real home, sir, nor how long she has lived there."

"Philpot Street is a respectable street," observed the Doctor, "I happen to know it. It is close to one of the Great London Hospitals, and is quite a superior street for its neighbourhood. If this woman's habits are quiet and respectable, I don't see that you need be uneasy, Mrs. Massey."

"I've no fault to find with herself," said the widow. "She's pleasant like, with a sensible, cautious sort of manner. But a sort of suspicion about her got into my head at first, may be at her wearing such a particular coloured cloak. It's yellow, sir, and I've never seen the like of such a one before."

"It may have come as a fashion from Paris," laughed the Doctor, as they all paused at the corner where he and the widow must turn aside to the woodman's cottage, leaving Maria to pursue the short remainder of her walk alone.

As she went on, she turned and looked behind her in the gathering twilight. She wondered that they had not been overtaken by her brother George, if he had come home by the train: he had been staying in London for two or three days. Maria was still looking backwards, when there was a sudden sound of footsteps near her; but these were in front, though she had seen nobody advancing towards her. Looking forward with a start, and a sudden leaping of her heart, she saw Allan Grale in the middle of the road, only a few paces in front of her!

This piece of road ran quite straight between high hedges, broken not far off by the lodge gates of Dering Court. Yet Maria was sure nobody had been there only a second before. As Allan could not have risen from the ground, where could he have come from?

"You here—so late—alone, Miss Vivian!" he exclaimed. He seemed out of breath—and surely he looked pale and wild!

"I am near home," she said. No mere ordinary greeting passed between them. And it was she who held out her hand to him.

"Can you do that still?" he asked, in a half choking voice.

"I can," she answered in a tone thrilled with emotion, "I can. Nothing can ever be with us as it might have been. But something always remains. Allan,"—but here she dropped her voice to a whisper so low that even the very air around could not catch the words. "Let me hear you bid me trust you on this one point," she went on, raising it again.

"Trust me!" he echoed, with a depth of bitterness and remorse, painful to her ear.

"If I thought I could not trust you so far, then may God strengthen me to prevent the evil that would ensue. You will thank me some day, Allan, if I save you from this last sin."

"Nobody else can ever suffer as I have made you suffer," he groaned.

"Never mind me," she answered, gently. "I have a right to suffer—you cannot help that."

"You can help it, Maria," he said passionately. "Save me from this terrible, haunting thought of you and your pain! Don't you know how *I* suffer? My very life is a burden to me. What is done cannot be undone. I would undo it if I could," he added with increased emotion.

"I cannot forget it," she answered. "You cannot take away my memory."

"No no; but in future, Maria—perhaps in future ——"

"Stay, Allan, there can be no hope of that kind now. Yet out of our wrecked lives, yours and mine, God can build——"

But what else she would have said Allan Grale never heard. For as they stood together, hand clasped in hand, pleading one with the other, love and anguish shining forth from the eyes of both, a slight form draped in a long yellow cloak came stealthily up the darkening road, under the shadow of the hedge. Unseen, she drew near—but Allan saw her as she glided past behind Maria. And on Maria's ear there fell in a low whisper, almost like the hiss of a serpent, one single word:—

"Beware!"

And the woman vanished into the twilight as rapidly and as stealthily as she had come.

Maria, seized with sudden terror, scarcely knew how she reached the Court. Allan Grale walked beside her to the lodge gates. There they parted with a lingering hand-pressure; but neither of them spoke another word.

When Allan got back to Moorland House, it was without his mother's hamper. But the excitement, caused in the household by Mr. Grale's unexpected return, saved him from any questions on the subject.

(*To be continued.*)

CARAMEL COTTAGE.

UNDER THE SUMMER-APPLE TREE.

WE have a saying in England, "It never rains but it pours," as applied, not to the rain, but to the occurrences of daily life. Dyke Manor was generally quiet enough, but on Thursday evening—the Thursday already told of—we were destined to have visitors. First of all, arrived Mr. Jacobson, our neighbour at Elm Farm, with his nephew, young Harry Dene; he had his gig put up, meaning to make an evening of it. It turned out to be a night, or nearly so, as you will soon find. Close upon that, Charles Stirling of the Court (my place) came in; and Mrs. Todhetley went to the kitchen to say that we should require supper. The stirring events of the week had brought them over—namely, the encounter on our land between the poachers and the keepers, and the flight of the valuable yard dog, Don, a Newfoundland.

That afternoon, Thursday, we had heard, as may be remembered, that Don was at Evesham, under the keeping of Mr. Dick Standish; and I had been told by Katrine Barbary that Mr. Reste had suddenly and unexpectedly disappeared from Caramel Cottage. Old Jacobson predicted that Dick Standish would come to be hanged; Charles Stirling said he ought to be transported.

"Of course you will prosecute him, Squire?" said Charles Stirling.

"Of course I shall," replied the Squire, warmly. "The police have him already safe enough if they've done their duty, and I shall be over at Evesham in the morning."

After a jolly supper they got to their pipes, and the time went by on wings. At least, that's what the master of Elm Farm said when the clocks struck eleven, and he asked leave to order his gig.

It was brought round by Giles, the groom; and we were all assembled in the hall to speed the departure, when old Jones, the constable, burst in upon us at the full speed of his gouty legs, his face in a white heat.

Private information had reached Jones half an hour ago that the poachers intended to be out again that night, but he could not learn in which direction.

Then commotion arose. The Squire and his friend Jacobson were like two demented wild Indians, uncertain what was best to be done to entrap the villains. The gig was ordered away again.

Some time passed in discussion. In these moments of excitement one cannot always bring one's keenest wits to the fore. Charles Stirling offered to go out and reconnoitre; we, you may be quite sure, were eager to second him. I went with Charles Stirling one way;

Tod and Harry Dene went another—leaving the Squire and Mr. Jacobson at the gate, listening for shots, and conferring in whispers with old Jones.

How long we marched about under the bright moonlight, keeping under the shade of the trees and hedges, I cannot tell you; but when we all four met at Dyke Neck, which lay between the Manor and the Court, we had seen nothing. Mr. Stirling went straight home then, but we continued our ramblings. A schoolboy's ardour is not quickly damped.

Beating about fresh ground together for a little while, we then separated. I went across towards the village: the other two elsewhere. It was one of the loveliest of nights, the full moon bright as day, the air warm and soft. But I neither saw nor heard signs of any poachers, and I began to suspect that somebody had played a trick on the old constable.

I turned short back at the thought, and made, as the Americans say, tracks for home. My nearest way was through the dense grove of trees at the back of Caramel Farm, and I took it, though it was not the liveliest way by any means.

But no sooner was I beyond the grove than sounds struck on my ear in the stillness of the night. They seemed to come from the direction of Caramel Cottage. Darting under the side hedge, and then across the side lane, and so under the hedge again that bound the cottage, I stole on the grass, as softly as a mouse. Poachers could not be at work there; but an idea flashed across me that somebody had got into Mr. Barbary's well-stocked garden, and was robbing it.

Peering through the hedge, I saw Barbary himself. He was coming out of the brewhouse, dragging behind him, with two cords, a huge sack of some kind, well-filled and heavy. Opposite the open door, on the furnace, shone a lighted horn lantern. Mr. Barbary pushed-to the door behind him, thereby shutting out the light, dragged his burden over the yard to the garden, and let it fall into what looked like—a freshly-dug grave.

Astonishment kept me intensely still. What did it all mean? Hardly daring to breathe, I stole in at the gate and under the shade of the hedge. Whatever it might contain, that sacking lay perfectly quiet, and Mr. Barbary began to shovel in the spadefuls of earth upon it, as one does upon a coffin.

This was nothing for me to interfere with, and I went away silently. It looked like a mystery, and a dark one; any way it was being done in secret in the witching hours of the night. What the time might be I knew not, the Squire having ordered our watches taken off before starting: perhaps one, or two, or three o'clock.

Tod and Harry Dene reached the gate of Dyke Manor just as I did; and we were greeted, all three, with a storm of reproaches by the Squire and Mr. Jacobson. What did we mean by it?—scamper

ing off like that for hours?—for *hours!*—Three times had the gig been brought out and put up again! Harry was bundled head foremost into the gig, and Mr. Jacobson drove off.

And it turned out that my suspicion touching old Jones was right. Some young men had played the trick upon him. I need not have mentioned it at all, but for seeing what I did see in Barbary's garden.

How Katrine Barbary passed that night you have seen: for, like many another story-teller, I have had to carry you back a few hours. Shivering and shaking, now hot, now cold, she lay, striving to reason with herself that *it could not be*; that so dreadful a thing was not possible; that she was the most wicked girl on earth for imagining it: and she strove in vain. All the events of the past day or two kept crowding into her mind one upon another in flaring colours, like the figures in some hideous phantasmagoria. The unexpected arrival of the bank-notes for Mr. Reste; her father's covetous look at them and his dreadful joke; their going out together that night poaching; their quarrelling together the next morning; their worse quarrelling at night, and their dashing out to the yard (as if in passion) one after the other. And, so far as Katrine could trace it, that was the very last seen or heard of Edgar Reste. The next morning he was gone; gone in a mysterious manner, leaving all his possessions behind him. Her father was reticent over it; would not explain. Then came the little episode of the locked-up brewhouse, which had never been locked before in Joan's memory. Mr. Barbary refused to unlock it, said he had put some wine there; told Joan she must do without the jack. What had really been hidden in that brew-house? Katrine felt faint at the thought. *Not wine.* And the terrible farce of packing Mr. Reste's effects and addressing them to Euston Square Station, London! Would they lie there for ever—unclaimed? Alas, alas! The proofs were only too palpable. Edgar Reste had been put out of the world for ever. She had been the shivering witness to his secret burial.

“What's the matter, Katrine? Are you ill?”

The inquiry was made by Mr. Barbary next day at breakfast. Sick unto death she looked. The very bright night had given place to a showery morning, and the rain pattered against the window-panes.

“I have a headache,” answered Katrine faintly.

“Better send Joan to the Manor to say you cannot attend to-day.”

“Oh, I would rather go; I must go,” she said hastily. For this good girl had been schooling herself as well as she knew how; making up her mind to persevere in fulfilling the daily duties of her life in the best way she should be able; lest, if she fell short abruptly, suspicion might turn towards her father. She had wildly prayed heaven to grant her strength and help to bear up on her course. Not from her must come the pointing finger of discovery. It is true that he—Edgar—was her first and dearest love; she should

never love another as she had loved him ; but she was her father's child, and held him sacred.

" Why must you go ? " demanded Mr. Barbary, as, having finished a plate of broiled mushrooms, he began upon a couple of eggs with an appetite that the night's work did not seem to have spoiled.

" The air—the walk—may do me good."

" Well, you know best, child. I suppose Todhetley will be off to Evesham after that dog of theirs," Mr. Barbary went on to remark. " Master Dick Standish must be a bold sinner to steal the dog one day and parade the open streets with it the next ! If——What is it now, Joan ? "

For old Joan had come in with a face of surprise. " Master," she cried, " has Tom Noah been at work here this morning ? "

" Not that I know of," replied Mr. Barbary. Tom Noah, an industrious young fellow, son to Noah, the gardener, was occasionally employed by Mr. Barbary to clean up the yard and clear the garden of its superfluous rubbish.

" Our back'us has been scrubbed out this morning, sir," went on Joan, still in astonishment. " And it didn't want it. Who in the world can have come in and gone and done it ? "

" Nonsense," said Mr. Barbary.

" But it has, master ; scrubbed clean ; the flags are all wet still. And the rain-water barrel's a'most empty, nearly every drop of water drawn out of it ! I'd not say but the yard has had a bit of a scrubbing, too, near the garden, as well as the back'us."

" Nonsense ! " repeated Mr. Barbary, his light tone becoming irritable. " You see it has been raining ! the rain has drifted into the brewhouse, that's all ; I left the door open last night. There ! go back to your work."

Joan was a simple-natured woman, but she was neither silly nor blind, and she knew that what she said was true. Rapidly turning the matter over in her mind, she came to the conclusion that Tom Noah had been in " unbeknown to the master," and so left the subject.

" I suppose I may take out the spare jack now, sir ? " she waited to say.

" Take out anything you like," replied Mr. Barbary.

Afraid of her tell-tale face, Katrine had moved to the window, apparently to look at the weather. Too well she knew who had scrubbed out the place, and why.

The rain had ceased when she set off on her short walk—for it was not much more than a stone's throw to the Manor ; the sun was struggling from behind the clouds, blue sky could be seen. Alone with herself and the open country, Katrine gave vent to her pent-up spirit, which she had not dared to do indoors ; sighs of anguish and of pain escaped her ; she wondered whether it would be wrong if she prayed to die. But someone was advancing to meet her, and she composed her countenance.

It was Ben Gibbon. For the past week or so, since Katrine had been enlightened as to her father's poaching propensities, she had somehow feared this man. He was son to the late James Gibbon, the former gamekeeper at Chavasse Grange, and brother to the present keeper, Richard. Of course one might expect that Mr. Benjamin would protect game and gamekeepers; instead of which, he was known to do a little safe poaching on his own account, and to be an idle fellow altogether. Katrine did not like his intimacy with her father, and she could not forget that he had passed part of that fatal evening with him and Edgar Reste.

"Showery weather to-day, miss," was Ben Gibbon's salutation.

"Yes, it is," answered Katrine, with intense civility—for how could she tell what the man might know?

"I suppose I shall find Mr. Barbary at home?"

"Oh, yes," faintly spoke she, and passed on her way.

II.

We started for Evesham under a sharp shower, the Squire driving Bob and Blister in the large phaeton. Tod sat with him, I and the groom behind. Not a shadow of doubt lay on any one of us that we should bring back Don in triumph—leaving Dick Standish to be dealt with according to his merits. But, as the Squire remarked later, we were not a match for Dick in cunning.

"Keep your eyes open, lads," the Squire said to us as we approached the town. "And if you see Dick Standish, with or without the dog, jump out and pounce upon him. You hear, Giles?"

"No need to tell me to do it, sir," answered Giles humbly, clenching his fists; he had been eating humble pie ever since Tuesday night. "I am ready."

But Dick Standish was not seen. Leaving the carriage and Giles at the inn, we made our way to the police station. An officer named Brett attended to us. It was curious enough, but the first person we saw inside the station was Tobias Jellico, who had called in on some matter of business that concerned his shop.

"We had your message yesterday, sir," said Brett to the Squire, "and we lost no time in seeing after Standish. But it is not your dog that he has with him."

"Not my dog!" repeated the Squire, up in arms at once. "Don't tell me that, Brett. Whose dog should it be but mine? Come!"

"Well, sir, I never saw your dog; but Tomkins, one of our men, who has often been on duty at Church Dykely, knows it well," rejoined Brett. "We had Standish and the dog up here, and Tomkins at once said it was not your dog at all, so we let the man go. Mr. Jellico also says it is not yours; I was talking to him about it now."

"What I said was this," put in Jellico, stepping forward, and speaking with meek deprecation. "If Squire Todhetley's dog has been

described to me correctly, the dog I saw with Standish yesterday can't be the same. It is a great big ugly dog, with tan marks about his white coat — ”

“ Ugly ! ” retorted the Squire, resenting the aspersion, for he fully believed it to be Don.

“ It is not at all an ugly dog, it's a handsome dog,” spoke up Brett. “ Perhaps Mr. Jellico does not like dogs.”

“ Not much,” confessed Jellico.

“ How came you to say yesterday at Church Dykely that it was the same dog ? ” Tod asked the man.

“ If you please, sir, I didn't exactly say it was ; I said I made no doubt of it,” returned Jellico, mild as new milk. “ It was in this way : Perkins the butcher was standing at his shop door as I passed down the street. We began talking, and he told me about the poachers having been out on the Tuesday night, and that Squire Todhetley had lost his fine Newfoundland dog ; he said it was thought the Standishes were in both games. So then I said I had met Dick Standish with just such a dog that morning as I was a coming out of Evesham. I had never seen the Squire's dog, you perceive, gentlemen ; but neither Mr. Perkins nor me had any doubt it was his.”

“ And it must be mine,” said the Squire hotly. “ Send for the dog, Brett ; I will see it. Send for Standish also.”

“ I'll send, sir,” replied Brett, rather dubiously, “ and get the man here if he is to be had. The chances are that, with all this bother, Standish has left the town and taken the dog with him.”

Brett was a talkative man, with a mottled face and sandy hair. He despatched a messenger to see after Standish. Jellico went out at the same time, telling Brett that his business could wait till another day.

“ I know it is my dog,” affirmed the Squire to Brett while he waited. Nothing on earth, except actual sight, would have convinced him that it was not his. “ Those loose men play all sorts of cunning tricks. Dick Standish is full of them. I shouldn't wonder but he has *painted* the dog ; done his black marks over with brown paint—or *green*.”

“ We've a dyer in this town, Squire,” related Brett ; “ he owns a little white curly dog and he dyes him as an advertisement for his colours, and lets him run about on the pavement before the shop door. To-day the dog will be (say) a delicate sky-blue, to-morrow a flaming scarlet ; the next day he'll be a beautiful orange, with a green tail. The neighbours' dogs collect round and stand looking at him from a respectful distance, uncertain, I suppose, whether he is of the dog species, or not.”

I laughed.

“ Passing the shop the other day, I saw the dog sitting on the door-step,” ran on Brett. “ He was bright purple that time. An old lady, driving by in her chariot, caught sight of the dog and called to the coachman to pull up. There she sat, that old lady, entranced

with amazement, staring through her eye-glass at what she took to be a phenomenon in nature. Five minutes, full, she stared, and couldn't tear herself away. It is true, gentlemen, I assure you."

Mr. Dick Standish was found, and brought before us. He looked rather more disreputable than usual, his old fustian coat out at elbows, a spotted red handkerchief twisted loosely round his neck. The dog was with him, *and it was not ours*. A large, fine dog, as already described, though much less handsome than Don, and out of condition, his curly coat a yellowish white, the marks on it of real tan colour, not painted.

Dick's account, after vehemently protesting he had nothing to do with the poaching affair on Tuesday night, was never for a minute out of his bed—was this: The dog belonged to one of the stable-helpers at Leet Hall; but the man had determined to have the dog shot, not being satisfied with him of late, for the animal had turned odd and uncertain in his behaviour. Dick Standish heard of this. Understanding dogs thoroughly, and believing that this dog only wanted a certain course of treatment to put him right, Standish walked to Church Leet on Wednesday morning last from Church Dykely, and asked the man, Brazer, to give him the dog—he would take him and run all risks. Brazer refused at first; but, after a bit, he agreed to let Standish keep the dog for a time. If he cured the dog, Brazer was to have him back again, paying Standish for his keep and care; but if not satisfied with the dog, Standish might keep him for good. Standish brought the dog away, and took him straight to Evesham, walking the whole way and getting there about nine o'clock in the evening. He was doctoring the dog well, and hoped to cure him.

Whether this tale was true or whether it wasn't, none of us could contradict it. But there was an appearance of fear, of shuffling in the man's manner, which seemed to indicate that something lay behind.

"It's every word gospel, ain't it, Rove, and no lie nowhere," cried Standish, bending to pat the dog, while the corner of his eye was turned to regard the aspect of the company. "You've blown me up for many things before now, Squire Todhetley, but there's no call, sir, to accuse me this time."

"When did you hear about this dog of Brazer's, and who told you of it?" enquired Tod, in his haughty way.

"Twas Bill Rimmer, sir; he telled me on Tuesday night," replied Dick. "And I said to him what a shame it was to talk of destroying that there fine dog, and that Brazer was a soft for thinking on't. And I said, young Mr. Todhetley, that I'd be over at Church Leet first thing the next morning, to see if he'd give the dog to me."

"It is not my dog, I see that," spoke the Squire, breaking the silence that followed Dick's speech, "and it may be the stableman's at Leet Hall; that's a thing readily ascertained. Do you know where my dog is, Dick Standish?"

"No, I don't know, sir," replied the man in a very eager tone;

"and I never knowed at all, till fetched to this police station yesterday, that your dog was a missing. I'll swear I didn't."

There was nothing more to be done, but to accept the failure, and leave the station, after privately charging the police to keep an eye on clever Mr. Dick Standish, his haunts, and his movements.

In the afternoon we drove back home, not best pleased with the day's work. A sense of having been *done*, in some way or other not at present explicable, lay on most of us.

It appeared that the groom shared this feeling strongly. In passing through the yard, I came upon him, in his shirt sleeves, seated outside the stable door, on an inverted bucket. His elbows on his knees, and his face in his hands, he looked the image of despair. The picture arrested me. Mack was rubbing down the horses; a duty Giles rarely entrusted to anybody. He was fond of Don, and had been ready to hang himself ever since Tuesday night.

"Why, Giles! what's the matter?"

"Matter enough, Master Johnny, when a false villyan like that Dick Standish can take the master, and the police theirselves, and everybody else, in!" was his answer. "I felt as cock-sure, sir, that we should bring home Don as I am that the sky above us is shining out blue after the last shower."

"But it was not Don, you see, Giles."

"*He* wasn't; the dog Standish had to show," returned Giles, with a peculiar emphasis. "Dick had got up his tale all smooth and sleek, sir."

"How do you know he had?"

"Because he told it me over again—the one he said he had been telling at the police station, Master Johnny. I was standing outside the inn yard while you were all in at lunch, and Standish came by as bold as brass, Brazer's dog, Rover, leashed to his hand."

"I suppose it is Brazer's dog?"

"Oh, it's Brazer's dog, that'un be," said Giles, with a deep amount of scorn; "I know *him* well enough."

"Then how can it be Don? And we could not bring home another man's dog."

Giles paused. His eyes had a far-off look in them, as if seeking for something they could not find.

"Master Johnny," he said, "I can't rightly grasp things. All the way home I've been trying to put two-and-two together, I am trying at it still, and I can't do it anyhow. Don't it seem odd to you, sir, that Standish should have got Brazer's dog, Rover, into his hands just at the very time we are suspecting he has got Don into 'em?"

I did not know. I had not thought about it.

"He has that dog of Brazer's as a blind. A blind, and nothing else, sir. He has captured our dog, safe and sure, and is keeping him hid up somewhere till the first storm of the search is over, when he'll be able to dispose of him safely."

I could not see Giles's drift, or how the one dog could help to conceal the possession of the other.

"Well, sir, I can't explain it better," he answered ; "I can't fit the pieces of the puzzle into one another in my mind *yet*. But I am positive it is so. Dick Standish has made up the farce about Brazer's dog and got him into his hands to throw dust in our eyes and keep us off the scent of Don."

I began to see the groom might be right ; and that the Standishes, sly and crafty, were keeping Don in hiding.

Mrs. Todhetley had met us with a face of concern. Lena's throat was becoming very bad indeed, and Mr. Duffham did not like the look of it at all. He had already come twice that day.

"I think, Johnny," said the mother to me, "that we had better stop Miss Barbary's coming to morrow ; Mr. Duffham does not know but the malady may be getting infectious. Suppose you go now to the cottage and tell her." So I went off to do so, and found her ill. On this same Friday afternoon, having occasion to ask some question of her father, who was in the garden, she found him planting greens on the plot of ground—the *grave*—under the summer-apple tree. Before she could speak, a shudder of terror seized her ; she trembled from head to foot, turned back to the kitchen, and sat down on the nearest chair.

Old Joan pronounced it to be an attack of ague ; Miss Katrine, she said, must have taken a chill. Perhaps she had. It was just then that I arrived and found her shivering in the kitchen. Joan ran up to her room in the garret to bring down some powder she kept there, said to be a grand remedy for ague.

It was getting dusk then ; the sun had set. To me, Katrine seemed to be shaking with terror, not illness. Mr. Barbary, in full view of the window, was planting the winter greens under the summer-apple tree.

"What is it that you are frightened at ?" I said, propping my back against the kitchen mantelpiece.

"I *must* ask you a question, Johnny Ludlow," she whispered, panting and shivering. "Was it you who came and stood inside the gate there in the middle of last night ?"

"Yes it was. And I saw what Mr. Barbary was doing—*there*. I could not make it out."

Katrine left her chair and placed herself before me. Clasping her piteous hands, she besought me to be silent ; to keep the secret for pity sake—to be *true*. All kinds of odd ideas stole across me. I would not listen to them ; only promised her that I would tell nothing, would be true for ever and a day.

"It must have been an accident, you know," she pleaded ; "it must have been an accident."

Joan came back, and I took my departure. What on earth could Katrine have meant ? All kinds of fancies were troubling my brain,

fit only for what in these later days are called the penny dreadfuls, and I did my best to drive them out of it.

The next morning Katrine was really ill. Her throat was parched, her body ached with fever. As to Lena, she was worse; and we, who ought to have gone back to school that day, were kept at home lest we should carry with us any infection.

"All right," said Tod. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good." He did not believe in the infection; told me in private that Duffham was an old woman.

Can any one picture, I wonder, Katrine Barbary's distress of mind, the terrible dread that had taken possession of it? Shuddering dread, amounting to a panic: dread of the deed itself, dread for her father, dread of discovery.

On the following morning, Sunday, a letter was delivered at Caramel Cottage for Mr. Reste, the postmark being London, the writing in the same hand as the last—Captain Amphlett's. Mr. Barbary took it away to his gun-room; Katrine saw it, later in the day, lying on the deal-table there, unopened.

The next Thursday afternoon, Lena being then almost well—for children are dying to-day and running about again to-morrow—I called at the Cottage to ask after Katrine. We heard she had an attack of fever. The weather was lovely again; the October sky blue as in summer, the sun hot and bright.

Well, she did look ill! She sat in the parlour at the open window, a huge shawl on, and her poor face about half the size it was before. What had it been, I asked, and she said ague; but she was much better now and intended to be at the Manor again on Monday.

"Sit down please, Johnny. I suppose Lena has been glad of the holiday."

"She just has. That young lady believes French was invented for her especial torment. Have you heard from Mr. Reste, Katrine? —what does he say about his impromptu flitting?"

She turned white as a ghost, never answering, looking at me strangely. I thought a spasm must have taken her.

"Not yet," she faintly said. "Papa thinks—thinks he may have gone abroad."

While I was digesting the words, some vehicle was heard rattling up the side lane; it turned the corner and stopped at the gate. "Why, Katrine," I said, "it is a railway fly from Evesham!"

A little fair man in a grey travelling suit got out of the fly, came up the path, and knocked at the door. Old Joan answered it and showed him into the room. "Captain Amphlett," she said. Katrine looked ready to die.

"I must apologise for intruding," he began, with a pleasant voice and manner. "My friend Edgar Reste is staying here, I believe."

Katrine was taken with a shivering fit. The stranger looked at her with curiosity. I said she had been ill with ague, and was about to

add that Edgar Reste had left, when Mr. Barbary came in. Captain Amphlett turned to him and went on to explain: he was on his way to spend a little time in one of the Midland shires, and had halted at Evesham for the purpose of looking up Edgar Reste—from whom he had been expecting to hear more than a week past; could not understand why he did not. Mr. Barbary, with all the courtesy of the finished gentleman, told him, in reply to this, that Edgar Reste had left Caramel Cottage a week ago.

"Dear me!" cried the stranger, evidently surprised. "And without writing to tell me. Was his departure unexpected?"

Mr. Barbary laughed lightly. That man would have retained his calmest presence of mind when going down in a wreck at sea. "Some matter of business called him away, I fancy," he replied.

"And to what part of England was he going?" asked Captain Amphlett, after a pause. "Did he say?"

Mr. Barbary appeared to have an impulsive answer on his lips, but closed them before he could speak it. He glanced at me, and then turned his head and glanced at Katrine, as if to see whether she was there, for he was sitting with his back to her. A thought struck me that we were in the way of his open speech.

"He went to London," said Mr. Barbary.

"To London!" echoed the Captain. "Why, that's strange. He has not come to London, I assure you."

"I can assure you it is where he told me he was going," said Mr. Barbary, smiling. "And it was to London his luggage was addressed."

"Well, it is altogether strange," repeated Captain Amphlett. "I went to his chambers in the Temple yesterday, and Farnham, the barrister who shares them with him, told me Reste was still in Worcestershire; he had not heard from him for some time, and supposed he might be returning any day now. Where in the world can he be hiding himself? Had he come to London, as you suppose, Mr. Barbary, he would have sought me out the first thing."

Whiter than any ghost ever seen or heard of, had grown Katrine as she listened. I could not take my eyes from her terrified face.

"I do not comprehend it," resumed Captain Amphlett, looking more helpless than a rudderless ship at sea. "Are you sure, sir, that there is no mistake; that he was really going to London?"

"Not at all sure; only that he said it," returned Mr. Barbary in a half mocking tone. "One does not enquire too closely, you know, into the private affairs of young men. We have not heard from him yet."

"I cannot understand it at all," persisted Captain Amphlett; "or why he has not written to me; or where he can have got to. He ought to have written."

"Ah, yes, no doubt," suavely remarked Mr. Barbary. "He was careless about letter-writing, I fancy. Can I offer you any refreshment?"

"None at all, thank you ; I have no time to spare," said the other, rising to depart. "I suppose you do not chance to know whether Reste had a letter from me last Tuesday week ?"

"Yes, he had one. It had some bank notes in it. He opened it here at the breakfast table."

Quite a relief passed over Captain Amphlett's perplexed face at the answer. "I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Barbary. By his not acknowledging receipt of the money, I feared it had miscarried."

Bidding us good afternoon, and telling Katrine (at whose sick state he had continued to glance curiously) that he wished her better, the stranger walked rapidly out to his fly, attended by Mr. Barbary.

"Katrine," I asked, preparing to take my own departure, "what was there in that gentleman to frighten you ?"

"It—it was the ague," she answered, bringing out the words with a jerk.

"Oh—ague ! Well, I'd get rid of such an ague as that. Good bye."

But it was not ague ; it was sheer fear, as common sense told me, and I did not care to speculate upon it. An uneasy atmosphere seemed to be hanging over Caramel Cottage altogether ; to have set in with Edgar Reste's departure.

A day or two later our people departed for Crabb Cot for change of air for Lena, and we returned to school, so that nothing more was seen or heard at present of the Barbarys.

III.

December weather, and snow on the ground, and Caramel Cottage looking cold and cheerless. Not so cheerless, though, as poor Katrine, who had a blue, pinched face and a bad cough.

"I can't get her to rouse herself, or to swallow hardly a morsel of food," lamented Joan to Mr. Duffham. "She sits like a statty all day long, sir, with her hands before her."

"Sits like a statue, does she," returned Duffham, who could see it for himself, and for the hundredth time wondered what it was she had upon her mind. He did his best, no doubt, in the shape of tonics and lectures, but he could make nothing of his patient. Katrine vehemently denied that she was worrying herself over any sweetheart—for that's how Duffham delicately shaped his questions—and said it was the cold weather.

"The voyage will set her up, or—*break* her up," decided Duffham, who had never treated so unsatisfactory an invalid. "As to not having anything on her mind, why she may tell that to the moon."

Katrine was just dying of the trouble. The consciousness of what the garden could disclose filled her with horror, while the fear of discovery haunted her steps by day and her dreams by night. She could not sleep alone, and Joan had brought her mattress down to the room and lay on the floor. When the sun shone, Mr. Barbary would

compel her to sit or walk in the garden ; Katrine would turn sick and faint at sight of that plot of ground under the apple-tree and the winter greens growing there. At moments she thought her father must suspect the source of her illness ; but he gave no sign of it. Since Captain Amphlett's visit, no further enquiry had been made after Edgar Reste. Katrine lived in daily dread of it. Now and then the neighbours would ask after him. Duffham had said one day in the course of conversation : "Where's that young Reste now ?" "Oh, in London, working on for his silk gown," Mr. Barbary lightly answered. Katrine marvelled at his coolness.

Upon getting back to the Manor for Christmas we heard that Mr. Barbary was quitting Church Dykely for Canada. "And the voyage will either kill or cure the child," said Duffham, for it was he who gave us the news ; "she is in a frightfully weak state."

"Is it ague still ?" asked Mrs. Todhetley.

"It is more like nerves than ague," answered Duffham. "She seems to live in a chronic state of fear, starting and shrinking at every unexpected sound. I can't make her out, and that's the truth ; she denies having received any shock.—So you have never found Don, Squire !" he broke off, leaving the other subject.

"No," said the Squire angrily. "Dick Standish has been too much for us this time. The fellow wants hanging. Give him rope enough, and he'll do it."

Brazer's dog was returned to him, safe and sound, but our dog had never come back to us, and the Squire was looking out for another. Dick Standish protested his innocence yet ; but he had gone roving the country with that other dog, and no doubt had sold Don to somebody at a safe distance. Perhaps had dyed him a fine gold first, as the dyer dyed his dog at Evesham.

"Now, Miss Katrine, there's not a bit of sense in it !"

It was Christmas Eve. Katrine was sitting at dusk by the parlour fire, and Joan was scolding. She had brought in a tray of tea with some bread-and-butter ; Katrine was glad enough of the tea, but said she could not eat ; she always said so now.

"Be whipped if I can tell what has got into the child !" stormed Joan. "Do you want to starve yourself right out ?—do you want to —"

"There's papa," interrupted Katrine, as the house door was heard to open. "You must bring in more tea now, Joan."

This door opened next, and someone stood looking in. Not Mr. Barbary. Katrine gazed with dilating eyes, as the fire-light flickered on the intruder's face ; and then she seized hold of Joan with an awful cry. For he who had come in bore the semblance of Edgar Reste.

"Why, Katrine, my dear, have you been ill ?"

Katrine burst into hysterical tears as her terror passed. She had

been taking it for Mr. Reste's apparition, you see, whereas it was Mr. Reste himself. Joan closed the shutters, stirred the fire, and went away to see what she could do for him in the shape of eatables after his journey. He sat down by Katrine, and took her poor wan face to his sheltering arms.

In the sobbing excitement of the moment, in the strangely wonderful relief his presence brought, Katrine breathed forth the truth ; that she had seen him, as she believed, *buried* under the summer-apple tree ; had believed it all this time, and that it had been slowly killing her. Mr. Reste laughed a little at the idea of his being buried, and cleared up matters in a few brief words.

"But why did you never write ?" she asked.

"Being at issue with Mr. Barbary, I would not write to him ; and I thought, Katrine, that the less you were reminded of me the better. I waited in London until my luggage came up, and then went straight to Dieppe, without having seen anybody I knew ; without having even shown myself at my Chambers ——"

"But why not, Edgar ?" she interrupted. Mr. Reste laughed.

"Well, I had reasons. I had left a few outstanding accounts there, and was not then prepared to pay them, and I did not care to give a clue to my address to be bothered with letters."

"You did not even write to Captain Amphlett. He came here to see after you."

"I wrote to him from Dieppe ; not quite at first, though. Buried under the apple-tree ! that *is* a joke, Katrine !"

It was Christmas Eve, I have said. We had gone through the snow, with Mrs. Todhetley, to help the Miss Pages decorate the church, and the Squire was alone after dinner, when Mr. Reste was shown in.

"Is it you !" cried the Squire in hearty welcome. "So you have come down for Christmas !"

"Partly for that," answered Mr. Reste. "Partly, sir, to see you."

"To see me ! You are very good. I hope you'll dine with us to-morrow, if Barbary will spare you."

"Ah ! I don't know about that ; I'm afraid not. Anyway, I have a tale to tell you first."

Sitting on the other side the fire, opposite the Squire, the wine and walnuts on the table between them, he told the tale of that past Tuesday night.

He had gone out with Barbary in a fit of foolishness, not intending to do any harm to the game or to join in any harm, though Barbary had insisted on his carrying a loaded gun. The moon was remarkably bright. Not long had they been out, going cautiously, when on drawing near Dyke Neck, they became aware that some poachers were already abroad, and that the keepers were tracking them ; so there was nothing for it but to steal back again. They had nearly reached Caramel Cottage, and were making for the side gate, when a huge

dog flew up, barking. Barbary called out that it was the Squire's dog, and —

"Bless me!" interjected the Squire at this.

"Yes, sir, your dog, Don," continued Mr. Reste. "Barbary very foolishly kicked the dog: he was in a panic, you see, lest the noise of its barking should bring up the keepers. That kick must have enraged Don, and he fastened savagely on Barbary's leg. I, fearing for Barbary's life, or some lesser injury, grew excited, and fired at the dog. It killed him."

The Squire drew a deep breath.

"Not daring to leave the dog at the gate, for it might have betrayed us, we drew him across the yard to the brewhouse, and locked the door upon him. But while doing this, Ben Gibbon passed, and thereby learnt what had happened. The next day, Barbary and I had some bickering together. I wanted to come to you and confess the truth openly; Barbary forbade it, saying it would ruin him: we could bury the dog that night or the next, he said, and nobody would ever be the wiser. In the evening, Gibbon came in; he was all for Barbary's opinion, and opposed mine. After he left, I and Barbary had a serious quarrel. I said I would leave there and then; he resented it, and followed me into the yard to try to keep me. But my temper was up, and I set off to walk to Evesham, telling him to send my traps after me, and to direct them to Euston Square Station. I took the first morning train that passed through Evesham for London, and made my mind up on the journey to go abroad for a week or two. Truth to confess," added the speaker, "I felt a bit of a coward about the dog, not knowing what proceedings you might take if it came to light, and I deemed it as well to be out of the way for a time. But I don't like being a coward, Mr. Todhetley, it is a rôle I have never been used to, and I came down to-day to confess all. Barbary is going away, so it will not damage him: besides, it was really I who killed the dog, not he. And now, sir, I throw myself upon your mercy. What do you say to me?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know," said the Squire, who was in a rare good humour, and liked the young fellow besides. "It was a bad thing to do—poor faithful Don! But it's Christmas-tide, so I suppose we must say no more about it. Let bygones be begones."

Edgar Reste grasped his hand.

"Barbary's off to Canada, we are told," said the Squire. "A better country for him than this. He has not been thought much of in this place, as you probably know. And it's to be hoped that poor little maiden of his will get up her health again, which seems, by all accounts, to be much shattered."

"I think she'll get that up now," said Mr. Reste, with a curious smile. "She is not going out with him, sir; she stays behind with me."

"With you!" cried the Squire, staring.

"I have just asked her to be my wife, and she says, Yes," said Mr.

Reste. "An old uncle of mine over in India has died; he has left me a few hundreds a year, so that I can afford to marry."

"I'm sure I am glad to hear it," said the Squire, heartily. "Poor Don, though! And what did Barbary do with him?"

"Buried him in his back garden, under the summer-apple tree."

Coming home from our night's work at this juncture, we found, to our surprise, a great dog fastened to the strong iron garden bench.

"What a magnificent dog!" exclaimed Tod, while the mother sprang back in alarm. "It is something like Don."

It was very much like Don. Quite as large, and handsomer.

"I shall take it in, Johnny; the Pater would like to see it. There, mother, you go in first."

Tod unfastened the dog and took it into the dining room, where sat Mr. Reste. The dog seemed a gentle creature, and went about looking at us all with his intelligent eyes. Mrs. Todhetley stroked him.

"Well, that is a nice dog!" cried the Squire. "Whose is it, lads?"

"It is yours, sir, if you will accept him from me," said Mr. Reste. "I came across him in London the other day, and thought you might like him in place of Don. I have taught him to answer to the same name."

"We'll call him 'Don the Second'—and I thank you heartily," said the Squire, with a beaming face. "Good Don! Good old fellow! You shall be made much of."

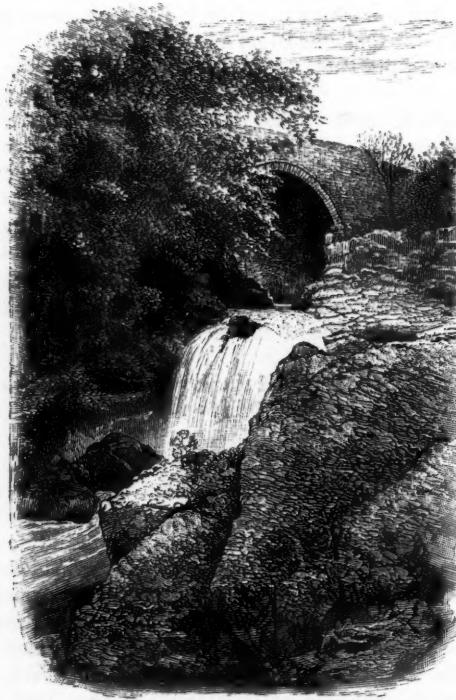
And that's the ending. He married Katrine without much delay, taking her off to London to be nursed up; and Mr. Barbary set sail for Canada. The bank notes, you ask about? Why, what Katrine saw in her father's hands were but *half* the notes, for Mr. Reste divided them the day they arrived, giving thirty pounds to his host, and keeping thirty himself. And Dick Standish, for once, had not been in the fight; and the Squire, meeting him in the turnip-field on Christmas Day, gave him five shillings for a Christmas-box. Which elated Dick beyond telling; and the Squire was glad of it later, when poor Dick had gone away prematurely to the Better Land.

And all the sympathy Katrine had from her father, when he came to hear about the summer-apple tree, was a sharp wish that she could have had her ridiculous ideas shaken out of her.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

AMONG THE WELSH.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON," &c. &c.



NEAR CAPEL CURIG.

In our last paper we sang the praises of Conway and of its ancient castle, and no one who has rambled amidst those ruins and gazed upon the far stretching view from the battlemented towers, will think the praise misplaced. On the contrary; whole pages might be devoted to descriptions, and yet there should not be found a sentence too much, a charm too coloured. It is impossible to overdraw the beauties of nature, or the effect upon the imagination of an ancient and romantic ruin bearing all the marks of former greatness, almost stamped with its own

history, and loaded with the beauties of time and decay.

In the present paper I do not know that there will be any old ruin to rhapsodise over, though the pen has a bad habit of rambling whither it listeth, and it is difficult to see the end from the beginning. But one thing is certain; we shall not meet again in these pages with a castle at all to be compared with that of Conway. Thus it was fitting to do homage to it: even to the bringing it again and again, if need be, before the mind's eye, as the gem of ruins in North Wales, a pearl in a perfect setting, an apple of gold in a picture of silver.

Starting from Llandudno Junction, which lies almost at the foot of Conway Castle, our back turned upon that pleasant watering-place,

the train takes us up the valley of the Conway, towards that paradise of artists, Bettws-y-Coed.

On the right is the estuary of the sea, looking at high water so much like a lake surrounded by low-lying, undulating hills : the hills of Carnarvonshire. The valley narrows as the train goes on its way. The river Conway flows calmly. In summer time, tide permitting, a small steamer plies up the river, as far as Trefriw, and it must be a very pleasant way of seeing one of the loveliest valleys in Wales, whose praises have been sung by poets and recorded unnumbered times on canvas. Certainly it forms one of the most interesting of the Welsh railway journeys : this and the portion of line between Rhyl and Llandudno Junction, where you pass Colwyn Bay.

The latter is, indeed, a very charming spot. The bay curves round, and the sea rolls gently up over the pure white sand of the beach. In the background are hills green and fertile, and narrow passes that seem to promise walks and climbs rich in beauty and interest ; whilst small dells that are almost miniature ravines come down almost to the very rails. In spring, I was told, they are gemmed with a wealth of ferns and wild flowers that would supply half Christendom. A fertile valley or plain lies between the sea and the hills, warm and sheltered in winter. No wonder, then, that Colwyn Bay is becoming a winter resort. Nor is it difficult to believe that it has a future before it, and in a few years will probably have sprung into a place of consideration. Overlooking the sea was a large hotel, which looked comfortable, well appointed and inviting. Nothing, it seemed, as the train went round the bay, could be pleasanter than its situation. Sheltered by hills in the background, it stood almost on the white sand of the beach, that sparkling in the sunshine, was almost washed by the sea, that, to-day, was, broad, blue and shimmering. Above, was a sky that must be warm and blue and sunny even in wintry weather. Almost, one was tempted to stop and take up one's abode here, and lie all day, and day after day, upon that white sand, and bask in the sunshine, and listen to theplash of the inrolling tide, with a favourite book to turn to when weary of one's own thoughts. What luxury this ; and even though alone, how opposite to solitude. Who could not be happy under such circumstances ?

But to leave Colwyn Bay and return to the Conway Valley. A very different scene this, for here there is no sea. But we have water in the shape of a broad, flowing river. A stately and majestic flow, without suspicion of falls or cataracts, or any of the more turbulent elements of river life.

The surrounding hills are fertile and often richly wooded. The fields black cattle are grazing, mixed with a good deal of cattle that are not black. There are farms here and there, apparently prosperous, if one may judge by the barns that are no doubt filled with plenty, and the well-made hay-ricks whose substance is visible.

On the slopes of the hills were a few houses, and blue smoke went curling upwards amongst the trees, with a picturesque effect which adds so much and so strangely to all scenery.

Here the scene was undoubtedly beautiful and romantic, and seemed to find its culminating point at Llanrwst, the station this side Bettws-y-Coed. You feel that here you are really and truly in Wales, amidst charms of which one has heard so much. Rhyl or Llandudno, when all is said and done, might belong to England or any other country, but up the Conway Valley and at Llanrwst, you are fast becoming decidedly Welsh. If nothing else betrayed the fact, the very names of the stations would tell you that, if not in Siberia or China, you must be in Wales. The extraordinary combination of letters, which allows one vowel to about every twelve consonants, and not always that, can be nothing at all approaching English. But the most startling name was that of a village in Anglesea with fifty-two letters in it and apparently only two vowels amongst them all. I spare the reader the infliction.

So Llanrwst, reposing in a luxuriance of verdure and foliage nothing less than enchanting, we felt was decidedly Welsh. The disposition of the hills and their forms made the spot singularly romantic as well as beautiful. There was space, too, in which to breathe freely. You were not crushed and overweighted by the hills, and all the sky was not eclipsed by them, nor all the sunshine. In this respect, Llanrwst has the advantage over Bettws-y-Coed. With all its reputation, the latter is too cabined, cribbed, confined. You feel that it is lovely, and yet, in a sense, cannot get at the loveliness; cannot see the wood for the trees, or the sky for the hills; and the hills seem to be very much in each other's way. It has scarcely any perspective, look which way you will.

Yet when the train reached Bettws-y-Coed it was impossible not to bow down before this favoured spot. And perhaps from the railway-station you have a finer and freer view than from any other part of the little place.

Bettws-y-Coed is, in its way, an Eden; a bower of roses, where nightingales ought to sing if they do not. On first arriving, you are impressed with the surrounding hills, all independent of each other, and forming, as it were, distinct chains, and which seem to have conspired to shut out Bettws-y-Coed from the world. So secluded is it that one wonders by whom it was first discovered. Undoubtedly by a pair of foolish lovers, who, for the time being, dwelling in a pleasant fools' paradise, were all the world to each other. An Edwin and Angelina, or Abelard and Heloise, or even a more tragically-disposed Romeo and Juliet. Whoever it might be, they discovered a "cool, sequestered glade," though it has long since ceased to be unknown and retired.

The hills are for the most part fertile and luxuriant, with a richness and abundance which is one of the charms of the place. There

are cultivated slopes, and patches of green where cattle are grazing, and fields planted with grain. Houses nestle amidst the trees on the hill sides, almost hidden from sight. Bettws itself is almost unquiet with the sounds of nature. The river runs a rapid and somewhat noisy course, especially when it becomes shallow and lays bare its rocky bed. Trees, overhanging the water, for ever whisper and sway and rustle in the wind. The air seems filled with sound. But it is pleasant and soothing, very distinct from the hum and rush and roar of cities, which fill you with unrest, and make you feel nothing so strongly and so certainly as that there will come a day when we shall put off this mortality and find rest unto our souls. What a laying down of the burden ; what a folding of the hands ; what a long-drawn sigh will loose the silver cord.

The village of Bettws-y-Coed consists, chiefly, of one winding street ; so winding that you can only see a few houses at a glance, and the place, in consequence, looks even less important than a village. This is, perhaps, an advantage. The road curves, and the houses are built under the very shadow of the hills, and often, in winter, must see little sunshine. Yet, said the landlord of the hotel, it was warm, and roses bloom all the year round. Damp, also, it certainly must be in wet weather, when, to the other sounds of nature, is added the monotonous and melancholy drip, drop from the trees, from which there is no escape.

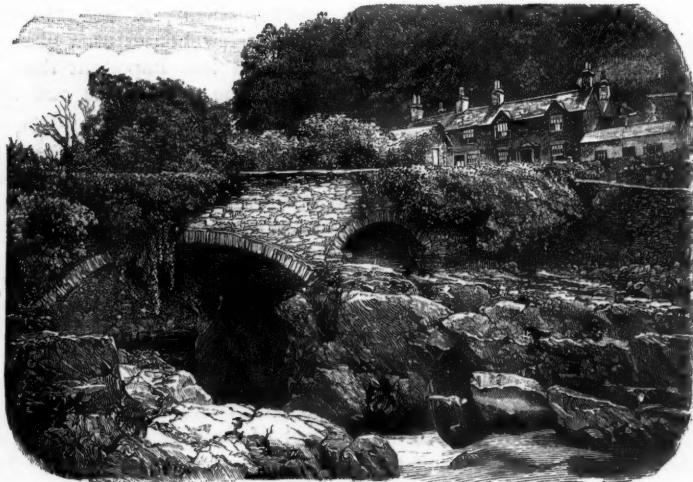
The post office, a sort of "all-at-once" shop, dealt in many things ; but the manner of the young woman who served was so unpleasant that one entered only under compulsion, and left with despatch. In Wales, almost more than any other place or country I know, one meets with the two extremes : a rough, rude manner, very ignorant and forbidding, or a politeness and civility that raises its possessors above the ordinary level of their kind. Perhaps, at Bettws-y-Coed the relaxing air affected the post office damsel—for the air is certainly relaxing, and to some temperaments must be trying. Or possibly she was overworked—a state of things quite as trying to the nerves and temper as a warm, soft atmosphere.

Nevertheless, it is an excellent spot for a sojourn of some days, and may be made a starting point for many excursions. In summer four or five coaches start every day for different parts of the neighbourhood, and by their aid all its beauties may best be seen. There is capital fishing in the streams, and an artist might almost take up his abode here and, at the end of a long life, scarcely have exhausted his subjects.

One of my first impressions, indeed, of Bettws-y-Coed was a camp stool, an artist, and the inevitable white umbrella, the sum-total apparently disporting itself in the very middle of the river. But on nearer approach the artist proved to have chosen a less watery resting-place, and on the edge of the bank was carefully transferring to his canvas the reflection of some graceful trees bending over the clear

water, and perhaps, like Narcissus, in love with their own image. They had every right to be so.

It is one of the pleasures of driving in North Wales, that if you hire a conveyance and start betimes, though you must choose your direction, your destination may remain a matter of chance or caprice, may be altered by the turning of a straw. So I found it one morning. The landlord had provided an excellent dogcart — by far the best kind of vehicle for a hilly country when you happen to be alone. The driver, intelligent and thoughtful, differed from most of his class, knew the name and nature of every hill and valley in the neighbourhood, and enlivened the way by sensible remarks and a just appreciation of the scenery.



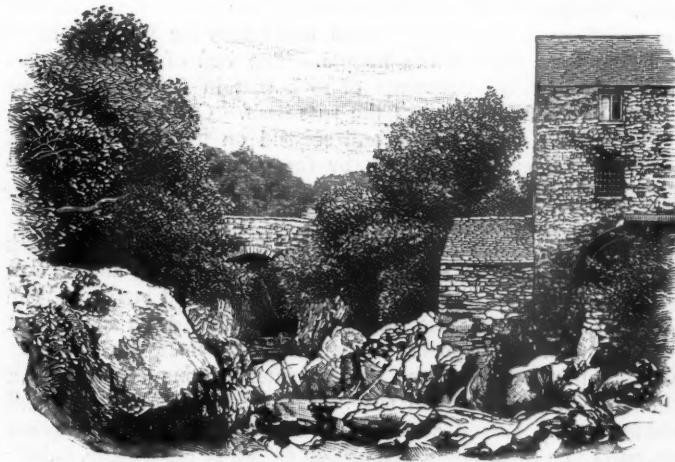
BETTWYS-Y-COED.

Passing the post office, and wondering whether its younger genius was in her customary unfriendly humour (the elder matron was of an opposite temperament and equally civil and obliging), we wound up the hill. The river to the right was sheltered by a wealth of trees, and as we ascended, so it gained in depth, until presently the Swallow Falls were reached. But they are not to be seen from the road ; one has to alight and walk a few yards.

I have said that nearly all the waterfalls in Wales were disappointing. It could not be otherwise, with the grand torrents of Norway still fresh in one's memory. Compared with these, the falls of Wales are nothing but miniature cascades, and one feels that they are childish, and you are ridiculous for troubling about them. The Swallow Falls were hardly an exception, and were less effective than usual because there was little water in them. Pretty, certainly, but so is a waterfall

upon a stage ; whilst of grandeur there was none. The water darted hither and thither in endless zigzags over an immense number of rocks and boulders more or less exposed. The falls in their countless channels and uncertain courses resembled the flight of birds, and possibly had suggested their name ; but it was rather the forked flight of the snipe than the more sweeping wing of the swallow.

We went our way through this beautiful vale of Llugwy, for the romantic river rejoices in this very inharmonious name. Mile after mile was passed amidst some of the richest and grandest scenery in North Wales, and soon we had before us the whole Snowdon range of hills. Snowdon itself was cloud-capped, and only once or twice, just for a moment, unveiled its highest peak. Of course one might



OLD MILL, BETTWS-Y-COED.

again draw comparisons between these so-called majestic mountains and those of Norway, but it is unnecessary, and it would be less just. The difference in size between one mountain and another is not so easily carried in the mind's eye, and does not force itself upon the attention. You see a mountain before you, feel that it is great, and are satisfied ; and if that other mountain that is afar off comes to your remembrance, you only feel that it is greater.

After some miles we reached Capel Curig, a small place in the midst of all this grand scenery of mountain, vale, and lake, a paradise for excursionists and fishermen. Then for a time the scene grew less rich and luxuriant, until presently we looked down upon the valley of Nant Frangon, and one of the grandest and most extensive views in Wales. Looked down from a great height upon a wide fertile plain, where in the distance a couple of lakes gleamed like silver streaks. Hills towered on either hand, and at the far end

Snowdon closed-in the vision. On our right were the Glyders, two mountains of granite, more than three thousand feet high, rocky, barren and stern, with steep, precipitous crags that were really grand, and fitly guard the entrance to the Pass of Llanberis, the wildest, most rocky, and, if the term be not too exaggerated, most sublime pass in Wales. Turning to the right, near a solitary house, now closed for the season but generally crowded in summer with tourists on pleasure bent, we left behind us that splendid view into the valley, which made one almost feel like gazing down upon a far-off and very lovely garden-world, and commenced a descent which continued for five long uninterrupted miles.

Nothing but a series of rocky, towering granite hills from beginning to end. Frequently the sides were smooth, and almost perpendicular. Here and there small cascades oozed down from the summits, to be lost before they reached the bottom. The bed of the valley was strewn with immense fragments of rock that in falling must have shaken the very foundations of the pass itself. Other great boulders hung apparently by a thread and seemed on the very instant of separating. In one or two places, by the peculiar look of the stone might be traced the action of ancient glaciers, but of which all other signs have long since disappeared.

The rocky hills on the left were more sloping, and fell further back from the road; and on small green patches, on ledges and narrow paths, one traced the little Welsh sheep grazing and straying. Ere many days were over, these would all be hunted down and folded by the dogs and the shepherds—many sheep and many folds.

On the left, too, below the road, at intervals one came upon a small house, a tiny mountain farm, looking desolate, abandoned and world-forgotten. Round about it were small patches of bright green grass, oases in a desert, on which a head or two of black cattle, quietly chewing the cud of reflection, probably formed the greater portion of the worldly substance of their owner. And here occasionally, with great care and industry, a small portion of ground had been enclosed, worked and tilled, until it brought forth grain to the husbandman, truly and indeed the precious fruit of the earth. And now from that stony wall uprose a huge heron, that, with slow and majestic flight, winged its upward way and was lost beyond the mountain tops.

And then—a sudden shock. Was the valley closing in? Had one of those great boulders loosened, and were we about to end our days beneath its weight? Or had the earth opened to swallow us up? No, nothing of all this; but the horse had fallen, and upon examination was found to have cut its knees badly. Apart from pity for the animal and vexation at the accident, it was a predicament to be in. We were still nearly two miles from Llanberis, and the horse was so hurt that to go forward seemed difficult, to return impossible.

But in this world, most difficulties have their way of escape: the irremediable seldom happens. Whether this is due to an overruling

Power, to the ministering of invisible but surrounding spirits, they who have seen most of the world and followed most carefully the course of their own lives and the lives of those about them, will find it an easy matter to decide. Our escape from this present trouble lay in a cottage not ten yards ahead : the only cottage all down the pass that we had seen on the right, or that could have been of any use to us.

An old woman was keeping house. She looked a hundred, and she had "no English." But the driver, who on his part had very nearly "no Welsh," quickly made her understand what was wanted, and in a few minutes hot water and a bucket and cloths were doing their best to stanch the wound and stem the deep red pool that had gathered in the road.

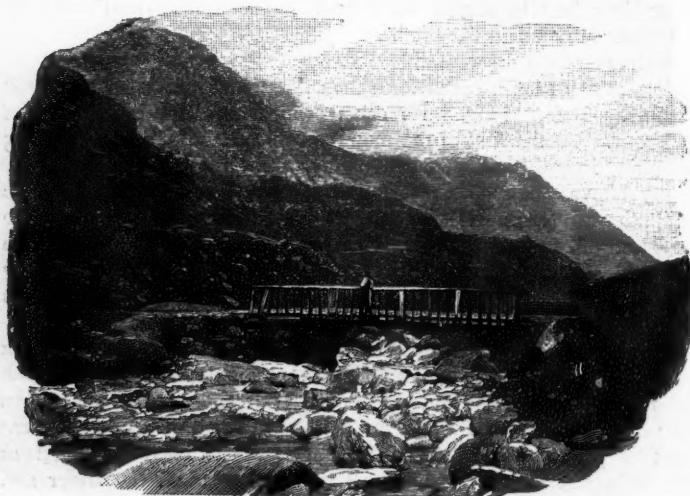
With such help we were able presently to go on our way, if not rejoicing, at any rate in better form than not many minutes ago seemed possible. Before long we reached the famous slate quarries of Llanberis. At the foot of the mountain was a lake of some size, now fast filling in with débris from the works. High up were the quarries, gallery above gallery, a great number of men at work, looking like Lilliputians. At intervals, the report of blasting thundered out like the boom of cannon, and echoed amongst the surrounding hills. The men are paid according to their labour, and some of them earn very high wages. But, like other sources of industry, the quarries pay less than they once did, and employ a smaller number of men.

It was a curious sight, even at a distance, to see these terraces of dark gray slate, rising one above another on the mountain side ; to watch the trucks running up and down, and hear the showers of broken slate rolling downwards with a noise like the swish of a hundred seas upon a pebbly shore. Soon after this we reached the hotel at Llanberis, where much sympathy was bestowed upon the driver and much care given to the horse. Here we halted for an hour and more; long enough to rest the animal, not long enough to stiffen it for the return journey.

All the wildness and severity of the pass had now disappeared. It is a very lovely spot. The hills surround the plain in great piles and magnificent slopes, and some are wooded and verdant, and others are stern and barren, whilst their outlines are short, peaked and diversified. The lakes of Llanberis add much to its beauty, but all this is more evident and much more striking in driving from Carnarvon than from the opposite direction. Then, one grand feature after another opens out from its best point of view, and you acknowledge that the drive is one of the loveliest in Wales.

And, continuing that drive, I am not sure that the wild pass which follows is not also more striking and effective, for the gloom and grandeur of the rocky valley, as it may be called, stand out in yet greater contrast with the softer beauty of the vale which has gone before.

In spite of all its beauty, Llanberis appeared scarcely the place for a lengthened sojourn. Probably no one ever does stay there very long. The Victoria Hotel, however, seemed comfortable and well arranged, though it belonged to the same proprietor as the Royal at Carnarvon, which is not greatly to be commended. The large coffee-room of the Victoria overlooked its garden, and in the garden, though so late in the season, roses bloomed and shed their fragrance. Hills stretched away on either hand, and seemed to meet where the road winds round towards Carnarvon. The village, nearly a mile beyond the hotel, had nothing particularly remarkable or interesting about it. A circular tower, near the inn, said to date back to the sixth century



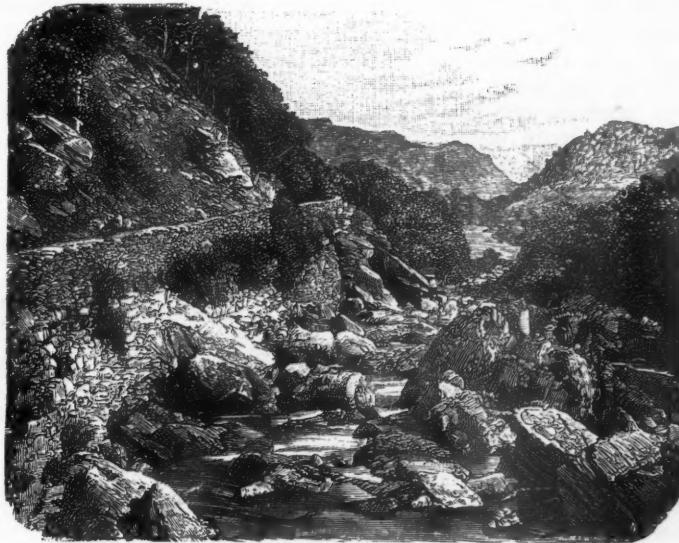
LLANBERIS PASS.

was dignified by the title of Dolbadarn Castle, and about a quarter of an hour's walk from this is a waterfall about sixty feet high, which rushes down in a thin stream, and is picturesque. But on the whole there was something decidedly depressing about Llanberis, and one was not sorry to set out on the return journey.

With a maimed horse that journey promised to be a more formidable undertaking than it proved. We began to retrace our steps with some misgiving, but the horse, doctored, rested and refreshed, stepped out bravely. It would evidently be a work of time, but that was all. To begin with, there was the five-mile pass to be taken, a steep uphill all the way, and it had to be done at a very walking pace. Presently we reached the cottage which had proved our friend-in-need, and halted to bestow largesse upon the good woman who had freely given of her best. For in the vexation of the contretemps the kindly dame

had been forgotten at starting, and until our return her meditations upon the gratitude of mankind must have placed that virtue at a serious discount. However, all was now made straight and satisfactorily balanced, and, if a woman's smile is divine, we certainly left a divinity behind us, though shrivelled and a century old.

By the time we reached the head of the pass, the shades of night were gathering. A cold mist was creeping round about the mountains and in the valley, shutting out their very forms and outlines. Capel Curig was invisible, and the lighted hotel windows looked warm and comfortable in comparison with the outside gloom and cold. For



LLEDR VALLEY.

with the mist comes a chilling atmosphere which defies resistance and makes nothing so desirable as the end of the journey.

This came at last. The horse bravely held on its way. We gradually descended into the hills, the valley narrowed almost to a pass, the rushing river was once more on our left, the trees looked mysterious and melancholy. Then came the lights of Bettws-y-Coed, then the hotel. The good horse had earned its rest, and indeed for some days to come would have to be in hospital.

One of the most romantic spots about Bettws-y-Coed is the Fairy Glen, and it is really worthy of its name. Passing up a narrow roadway, hills romantically disposed on either side and innumerable small passes, you reach a gate, where of course no gate need be, and where

a maiden stands to exact a toll and admit you into the glen. It is a wild scene, all rocks and tangle and trees. Far down, the river runs noisily over its rocky bed, and the trees that overshadow it find no reflection in its broken surface, but the sunshine glinting through those trees is caught up by the water in a thousand sparkling jewels. It is perhaps the loveliest glen in Wales.

From this you may, if you please, continue your way up the valley of the Lledr. To-day, with another horse, and a much less intelligent driver, after paying due respect to the Fairy Glen, we ourselves went up this lovely valley. On our left was the river, which in parts runs in a narrow rocky precipitous channel, with great rush and noise, and in the way of water and cataract seemed the finest and most romantic thing I had seen in Wales. High, wooded hills lay to the right, and every now and then we passed through short avenues of over-arching trees, which threw their deep shadows athwart the road. A few fishermen were whipping the stream, and several artists, under the inevitable white umbrella, were doing their best to earn fame and fortune. Down the road came a man carrying a machine that looked like a camera, and we took him to be a travelling photographer. But on near approach he turned out to be a blacksmith—a very black one indeed—whose life was more probably devoted to the useful than the artistic.

Passing through a grove of fresh young firs, whose scent was refreshing, the mountains opened out, and we reached Pont-y-Pant, a spot with a railway station, and a white, pleasant looking inn, where a fisherman might be happy and industrious, whilst his days succeeded and resembled each other. It struck me that I would rather make a long sojourn here than at Bettws-y-Coed. The spot was more open and healthy, and quite sufficiently beautiful.

After this we met many droves of black cattle coming down from the hills for the winter. They looked wild and ready to charge us—but happily confined their desires to looks only. Some of their drovers appeared as wild as the cattle; tall, strong men, with limbs like Hercules, who might almost have fought with the beasts and conquered them.

Passing the remains of an old Roman bridge, the character of the valley changed. All its beauty and luxuriance was lost; it grew wild and severe. The hills were bare of trees or any vegetation, except the short rank grass which often accompanies marshy ground. Peat stacks abounded, some of them covered with great branches of trees brought there for that purpose; and long black lines, where the turf had been removed, ran along the ground and reminded one of the peat fields of Shetland, though with not half the grandeur, tone, and fine effect of those wide-reaching and desolate moors.

We ascended a wild, bleak, unprotected mountain path, one of the highest mountain passes in Wales. And, alas, as if the scene was not bare and desolate enough, uprose a cold wind, down came torrents of

rain, and our misery was complete. All sunshine had disappeared, wet clouds enwrapped us.

We came to a solitary house in the very midst of the pass, looking like a house of ill-omen, where murders might have been committed, and victims thrown down wells, or reduced to ashes, with no bird of the air to carry the tale. A house of most sinister aspect. Sinister must have been its dealings also, for it was closed and tenantless, and those who once held sway there, and called it an inn, had been deprived of their licence. The place where the sign had hung was visible; the sign itself was no more. It had probably borne some strangely inappropriate name, just as a public-house I have frequently passed in visiting a dear old far-off Rector, whom we have met before in these pages, had for its sign until lately : "THE GUARDIAN ANGEL!"

Outside the door of this deserted Welsh inn, which sheltered and half-concealed its shame by an angle of the house, was a small dried-up pool, and one's imagination pleased itself by running riot, and conjuring up all kinds of ghastly deeds—a pool made by the blood of victims murdered in the dead of night, and buried by torchlight, a wild glare reflected upon the faces of the imps and fiends digging deep holes and dancing upon newly-made, unholy graves. But these things *have* happened in the world, and ghosts may well be said to walk. All reason is against ghosts, all evidence in favour of them, said Dr. Johnson; but if we came to search out the matter, perhaps even reason would add a certain weight to evidence.

We left the wicked-looking house behind us, whose very silence and desertion seemed mysterious, and began to descend towards Festiniog. Soon we were in the midst of slate quarries, right and left, and everything that looked business-like and unromantic. Yet, after all, slate quarries are clean work; unsightly to a certain extent, but far less so, and far less repelling, than the works of the Black Country districts of England. Here, there were no black coal-pits, no huge chimnies sending forth volumes of smoke, to defile the air and turn the pure skies of heaven into a dark and melancholy pall. And the men seemed a better class than the miners; less rough and savage, more humanized. No wonder that the poor miners, surrounded by such influences, cut off from all that is beautiful in nature, having nothing in their lives or their occupation to elevate them—no wonder that so many sink to the lowest level of humanity.

Festiniog itself is such a town as one might expect it to be, with interests all centred in trade. Its crooked streets are untidy and depressing, and the visitors' book at the Queen's Hotel recorded that at Festiniog it always rains. It was raining now, in torrents, so we concluded that the statement was more correct than such records often are. The waitress, however, must have been a sort of feminine Mark Tapley. She was interesting and entertaining, no longer very juvenile, but full of energy. And this in spite of an approaching dissolution: not of the body, but as regarded her connection with the hotel. After

living there for any number of years, she was about to give up all and depart for America, simply because friends had written home that they wanted her.

She was a Welshwoman, and spoke English with a very pretty accent. "Maybe," she said, whilst bustling about and spreading the festive though frugal board, "I ought to have gone years ago, when I was a younger woman. Old trees, it is said, don't bear trans-



FAIRY GLEN.

planting. But I've plenty of courage and spirit, and I don't fear. My passage is taken and my berth chosen, and I've some one to meet me at the other end of the journey." And spirit she certainly had, and evidently a temperament to make the best of things, and no doubt she would get on in the New World. But it was a bold undertaking on the part of a woman no longer in her first youth.

I think her cheerfulness must have influenced the weather. Suddenly, without warning, the rain ceased, the clouds dispersed, out came sunshine and blue sky. Nothing could have been more welcome; and from Stormy, one's spirits went up, with the glass, to Set.

Fair. Jehu, who had been anxiously consulting the clouds for the last half-hour, came round in grand form, with dry rugs and cushions and a beatified countenance.

We climbed the hill between the quarries, admired the quality and quantity of the slates ; noted that the very poles in the back gardens were made of slate, that walls and palings and even front doors were made of slate ; in fact that we were surrounded by an atmosphere of slate, until we wondered whether they had discovered a means of making it transparent for windows, and reducing it to an article of food. Up the hill, and past the solitary and deserted house, which defied even the sunshine to make it look cheerful, and over the mountain height, and down again into the lovelier, smiling Valley of the Lledr. Trees overhung the winding river. Far off sloping hills were cut by hedges to their summit, enclosing rich and fertile fields, and making this valley so sunny and rich in appearance. Approaching Bettws-y-Coed, the valley narrowed ; we plunged into the heart of the hills ; trees overhung our path. Over the old Waterloo bridge spanning the Lledr, a sharp curve to the right, and our drive was ended.

Just within the passage was the old oak, painted by David Cox, which gives its name to the hotel, and is as much a fixture, I suppose, as the stone of which the house is built, or the ground on which it stands. Certainly it is no wonder that David Cox thought so much of the beauties of the neighbourhood.

That night the moon rose full of a "divine effulgence" in the dark blue sky, a portion of the landscape illuminated with her pale, soft light, the rest thrown into deeper shadow. Stars shone as they shine only in frosty weather, or in a pure atmosphere. Hills stood out in broad outlines distinctly mapped against the dark heavens. Here and there a light gleamed from a house on the slopes, making more dense the surrounding blackness. Trees in the moonlight, like dark spectres, stretched forth ghostly but well-clothed arms, for the leaves had not yet begun to fall. The rooks that are for ever cawing round the hotel and peer in at your windows with black eyes full of mischief, like birds of evil omen, were now silent and unseen. Not a breath of air stirred, and the leaves and the branches had no rustle in them. Except for the noise of the river, which never ceases, everything was shrouded in mysterious, solemn silence. Not a creature was abroad. Silence everywhere : in the plain, and on the hills, and in the air. And over all, the waning moon, pursuing her course, fulfilling her destiny ; a dead world, but one with a mission still, to be accomplished and delivered up only on that day when moons shall wax and wane no more.

“HER FRANCIS.”

BY MARY MUDIE, AUTHOR OF “ST. MICHAEL’S PRIORY.”

“MANY a true word is spoken in jest.” So runs the old saying, and Mabel Talbot could for one have vouched for its truth, for a harmless jest became her fate. She was one of a large family of boys and girls, had lived the twenty-two years of her life in a country village, and had never stayed more than a day at a time in London. What an enchanted prospect then seemed to open before her when her friend Helen Keith asked her to spend the winter with herself and her mother in Florence!

As Mabel was starting, one young married sister said to her :

“I wonder if you will meet ‘your Francis’ at last?”

And another sister, with the superior wisdom of one who had just been wooed and won, answered for Mabel :

“Of course she will ! only mind, Mabel, that you look well out for him.”

“Your Francis” was the jest above alluded to. One day Mabel had, in the hearing of eleven merry brothers and sisters, thoughtlessly said : “How I dislike the abbreviation of Francis into Frank ! Francis is a fine name, and Frank has no more character about it than Charlie or Harry.” That was enough ; and the latest phase of the joke was the ludicrous notion that, as she was by far the prettiest of the family, she must be waiting for a certain “Francis,” not only so named by his godfathers and godmothers, but one who had never at any time been called by its abbreviation. Mabel laughed as merrily as any of them, and then forgot all about “her Francis” until she reached the Italian frontier, when for the first time her journey became marked by some vicissitudes.

On a cold, stormy night the train was stopped at the little station of C—, for the floods were out. A scene of confusion ensued. After the Italian guards had made the sleepy and alarmed foreigners understand what had occurred, everyone naturally left the train to seek what accommodation could be found in the village ; only, however, to return with vexation added to their former alarm. The one solitary inn could only take in a few of the passengers, and the remainder had to make back again to their carriages with the difference of being wet through instead of dry.

Mabel Talbot was one of the fortunate ones. Some kindly arms —whose she never knew—carried her and her small luggage safely over the water and she made her way to the inn. She could not speak a word of Italian, but quickly comprehended how kind and sympathetic was her welcome. Neither gratitude, however, nor a vivid imagination could help her to feel comfortable. Her narrow

passage-room had a damp, stone floor, was lighted by a small wick floating in oil, and was pervaded by a smell of garlic. Her bed was a narrow table, her pillow her carpet-bag, and her travelling rug had to do duty for everything else.

As she lay there cramped and shivering, she became gradually accustomed to the dim light and saw an object which had escaped her notice and which looked like a coat lying across a chair. She was not long in fetching it, and, even in the semi-darkness, saw that it was a thickly-lined English ulster, probably the property of one of her fellow-passengers who, she had little doubt, would have given much to be wearing it at that moment. She felt, however, that it was little use pitying the unlucky owner; and very grateful to him for having left it, she lay down again and spread it over her. Her teeth stopped chattering, her eyes closed, and she went off into a sound sleep.

When the noises made by the awakening household began to disturb her, the following dream came to her:—

She dreamt that she was engaged to be married to a not particularly young man, whose Christian name was—Francis. His face made a strong impression upon her. It was not strictly handsome, but the owner had what is called a fine head. Further, he had a kindly expression and a slightly inquisitive look in his keen, gray eyes which was very characteristic. How they came to be engaged she was unable to remember, but he seemed to know her past, *for he was asking her to call him Frank.*

"Not for the world!" she said. "I hate the name. You would not seem yourself at all. I might just as well call you Charlie or Harry."

"We have it on very good authority that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," he answered, smiling.

"Then Shakespeare was wrong," returned the dreamer, not smiling at all.

"Am I to take it for granted, then, that you took me for my name and not for myself?"

"Your name is Francis," persisted Mabel.

"I am aware of it. But Francis or Frank, I am myself."

"And yourself is Francis."

But in spite of her obstinacy she got the worst of the argument, and the soft-hearted Francis, seeing signs of tears, offered to make it up. She would not, however, accept his kiss of peace, and at that moment, awoke to find herself struggling so much that she had nearly fallen off the table.

The velvet collar of the ulster was lying across her mouth, its soft touch, having, no doubt, suggested that lover-like ending to her dream.

At first Mabel was too bewildered to distinguish dream from reality; but the daylight streaming in at the curtainless window

gave her a vague idea that she must be "up and doing." As she jumped down she dragged the ulster with her, and as she lifted it up a letter fell out of one of the pockets. She would have been no true daughter of Eve had she not been seized with a desire to know the name of the owner of that coat, under the comforting warmth of which she had slept so well and also dreamt that ridiculous dream.

"Why should I not know the name?" she asked herself, picking up the letter.

And as there was no one to answer her—only her very natural curiosity to urge her the other way—she did read the name:—

"Francis Grantley, Esquire!"

II.

"Now don't be foolish and get excited about nothing," said Mabel to herself "for you would have dreamt exactly the same dream if Mr. Grantley's name had been Thomas or John." This seemed so true that she did preserve some calmness of mind. "Any way you and he are never likely to meet as long as you live, for he is probably on his way to India, or regions equally remote." And with this last self-comforting admonition she resolutely put the letter back in its place and folded up the coat.

"He was never called Frank, I am sure," she soliloquized, unable to keep from the forbidden subject, as she remarked the unusual length and breadth of the coat, "though of course Franks are of all sizes. Poor man!" she continued as she felt its thickness. "Perhaps if he had known what a boon it was to me he would not have minded so much shivering all night. I wish I could let him know how much obliged I am.— And why should he not know it?" as a sudden thought struck her.

If she could have spoken Italian she would have left a message with the landlord; therefore, instead, she scribbled in pencil, on the back of the letter:

"Many thanks for the loan of the coat."

What is done cannot be undone. Perhaps no one ever realised that more thoroughly than did Mabel Talbot, when she saw those few pencilled words of hers staring back at her from a stranger's letter. She could not possibly tear up the envelope; she could only thrust the letter back into the pocket of the coat and hide her own deed from her own eyes. How devoutly she hoped that Mr. Grantley really was on his way to India! The further off the better. And during her journey she registered many a vow never again to act on any occasion in life without due reflection.

The Keiths had rooms on the sunny side of the river, on the Lung' Arno Acciajoli; and coming, as Mabel did, from the gray November skies of England, she perfectly revelled in the sunny weather which set in on her arrival in that brightest of cities. She was also, according

to Helen Keith (a handsome, clever woman, in every way a contrast to pretty little inexperienced Mabel), in one succession of "gushes" over every picture and statue, piece of tapestry and mosaic, the Cathedral and Giotto's Tower, the Baptistry and the wonderful gates which Michael Angelo pronounced fit to be the gates of Paradise; Fra Angelico's angels and the Lucca della Robbia, &c. So full of delight and excitement was she that for some days she forgot both her whimsical dream and her fears. Under Helen Keith's guidance she was made to "do" Florence thoroughly. Helen had her own opinions about most things, which she expected Mabel to accept; and Mabel, not being given to original thought, was nothing loth to be helped over this her first stile into the domains of art.

One morning, however, Helen took her to Giotto's little chapel in the church of Santa Croce, and, giving her Ruskin's little pamphlet, let her puzzle the matter out for herself.

Very puzzled did Mabel feel, as she leant against the wall opposite the fresco which depicts the trial by fire before the Soldan, and read out a sentence here and there. She was quite deep in thought when she heard spoken, very quietly, in English :

"What a pretty voice!"

"And a still prettier face! What brown eyes and golden hair!" said another voice.

At that moment two gentlemen, presumably the speakers, descended the steps of the chapel behind her, and walked down the nave. They passed close to her, and, as they did so, Mabel made a sudden dart forward. Enveloping one of the two, a very tall man, was *the* ulster; she would have known it again anywhere!

III.

As Mabel started forward, Helen sprang after her. "Mabel!" she cried, aghast, "do you want to show the pretty face?"

"My face!" and Mabel looked at her in amazement. "No; I want to see his."

It was now Helen's turn to look amazed, the more so that Mabel suddenly coloured violently all over that pretty face so little in her thoughts, and turning sharply away stared blindly at a medallion of St. Louis through a rush of tears, which had quickly come into her eyes. Whether she was most vexed with herself, or mortified by her friend, or disappointed in her desire, she could not possibly have told.

"I don't understand, Mabel," said Helen, very gently. "You cannot know those men, or they would not have spoken so of you?"

Mabel made the worst answer she could have chosen. "No, I don't know them. I only know the ulster that one of them wore."

"His ulster!" cried Helen Keith, laughing and wondering whether Mabel was losing her senses.

Mabel knew that, in her place, she would have felt the same, but, being in her own, she was not at all amused, was unaccountably sore, and certainly felt very foolish. Outside the church Helen began again.

"You really do not know those men, Mabel?"

Mabel had grown wiser; she only shook her head.

"Then I may as well tell you that I know one of them—the one who spoke of the pretty voice and who also wore *the* ulster—very well."

"No! do you really?" cried Mabel, very eagerly.

Helen was more than ever mystified. "He is one of our neighbours at home," she continued; "so you will soon get to know something more of him than his coat."

Life is not all art in Florence, and Mabel went to a dance that evening where she might have thought herself in England but for a sprinkling of uniforms and some artistic and musical heads. The foreign element would have interested her had she not been on the look out for an English face. She believed herself to be very rational, yet she saw no face like her dream "Francis," and soliloquised on the folly of the English, who keep up their usual habits wherever they go. How could anyone dance all the evening after sight-seeing all day? At that moment she heard Helen say :

"Francis, come and be introduced to Mabel Talbot. Mabel, this is another of my old friends, Mr. Grantley."

There was no weariness about Mabel now, and Helen wondered at the excitement which lit up the usually pale face and soft eyes.

"Miss Keith tells me that this is your first visit to Italy," said Mr. Grantley, when Helen had left them.

Mabel summoned the courage to look up—looked and met the very same shrewd eyes which she had seen in her dream!

But, together with the shock of her surprise, came the comforting reassurance that those eyes were looking at something quite new to them. And indeed it was a very pleasant sight they looked at, but she was too full of her secret thoughts to notice the evident admiration she was causing.

"Of course," she was saying to herself, "as he was one of my fellow-travellers, I must have seen him without remembering it." And this practical explanation of a seemingly mysterious occurrence restored her equanimity.

She did not let their conversation rest long on a commonplace footing, and very soon managed to introduce the word "adventure."

"The days for adventure are over," he said.

"But not for odd things," she returned, provoked into boldness.

He threw back his head and laughed. "You are quite right, and the oddest thing happened only the other day. I was a passenger in that train which was stopped by the floods. Perhaps you may remember about it?"

Perhaps she could !

" Well, I scrambled out into the water like everyone else and found some sort of accommodation at the inn. At the last moment, however, I changed my mind ; only, worse luck, I left my ulster in the little hole of a room that I was to have occupied."

" Were you not very cold without it ? " asked Mabel, finding it impossible not to betray some sympathy now that she learnt that she was really indebted to him for the room, as well as, by chance, for the coat.

" Oh, yes ; but then I am accustomed to the ups and downs of travel ; and the night was soon over."

" Did you recover your coat easily in the morning ? "

" At once ; for the lady who had occupied the room had already left it. But now to come to the point of my story. A few days ago I looked for a letter which I had left in the pocket of my ulster, and what do you think I found written at the back of it ? "

Mabel could think very well and felt herself blushing hotly.

" Many thanks for the loan of the coat ! "

" What a bold creature ! " said Mabel, thinking, that she would rather say it of herself than hear it from him. To her amazement all mirth vanished from his face.

" Bold ! " he cried, looking indignantly at her. " On the contrary, I think it was very thoughtful and sympathetic. I am sure she is a charming girl."

" Why not a charming old lady ? "

" Old ! " Then he smiled and looked beyond the bright, listening face as if he saw something almost as sweet. " No, I know that she was young. The landlord called her a *Signorina*."

" Everybody is called a *Signorina* in Italy," said Mabel hastily, not all his championship having shaken her opinion that she had done a supremely silly thing. " The very blind beggars who stand propped up against the sunny walls of the Lung' Arno address every woman of whom they beg as *Signorina*."

" No use, Miss Talbot ; I have a theory about the writer of those words and you will not laugh me out of it. I do not suppose that she was a young girl, as she was alone, but she was certainly new to travelling or she would have taken the good chances with the bad ones more philosophically."

What a description of herself, thought Mabel.

" No, no," he went on smilingly. " I have my ideal and I shall keep to it. And, what is more, if she is in Florence, sooner or later, I shall identify her."

" But you know nothing of her except her handwriting."

" And is not that enough ? "

Looking at his keen eyes, and remembering that he was an habitué of the Keiths' house, Mabel felt sure that it was quite enough. And her heart sank within her.

IV.

THAT was not the only time that Mabel Talbot and Mr. Grantley discussed the "charming girl" who had permitted herself such a liberty with his letter. But though he persistently stood her champion, it did not prevent his falling—and very completely too—in love with this very pretty young woman of two-and-twenty who was as fresh and merry as a child. No day passed without his seeking Mabel.

One day he overtook her carrying a book from the library.

"Mrs. Oliphant's Life of St. Francis! Ah! my namesake," he said, taking her book from her.

"More likely your namesake if he had been St. Frank," answered Mabel laughing.

He laughed too as he said: "That does not sound very saint-like. But, as it happens, I have never been called Frank in my life. My dear mother disliked the abbreviation; and, oddly enough, at school, though my nicknames were numberless, Frank was not one of them."

As he told her this, Mabel felt that it was no use saying any more against herself. The children had been right, and she had found a Francis after all. But was he *her* Francis?

From that day she felt an absurd jealousy of that ideal young lady traveller. More than ever did she dread the thought of his discovering her identity with herself. She became even more vigilant in concealing all writing of hers and also avoided the subject as much as possible. Helen Keith, however, who had long known his side of the story, brought it up one day during a walk up the hills to Fiesole, the little Etruscan city which overlooks Florence.

"No," he answered. "I have not seen the handwriting, but I shall see it one day." Then he had one of his hearty laughs, in which Helen could not help joining. Mabel on any other subject would have laughed too.

"I know I shall see it," he continued; "I feel it in the air. Don't you feel things in the air, sometimes, Miss Keith?"

"Yes, I feel a Tramontana like to-day." And Helen shivered as the fierce north wind met them, and drew a shawl up to her face, but it was chiefly to hide a smile. She knew Mr. Grantley's feelings for Mabel; also the latter's ridiculous and evident jealousy—a fact which could not but give him hope.

"How practical you are, Miss Keith. You seem to take a delight in snubbing me. You snubbed me, I remember, the first time I had the pleasure of speaking to you."

"Did I? Then I beg your pardon. I won't do it again."

"But I like it," he said quickly. "Pray snub me—in your own way—as much as you like."

"If you talk of feeling a strange handwriting in the air, I warn you that I shall do so."

"But I do feel it, I assure you. Did you never play at the game of crying hot and cold? Well. I feel like that. I feel near to very hot."

"Then you may be sure that this north wind will be followed by a south one. A Scirocco always follows a Tramontana."

He was, however, to prove himself right.

The very next day, when the Keiths and Mabel returned from a drive they found Francis Grantley awaiting their return. Mabel had only made a few steps into the room when she gave a suppressed shriek and turned to fly.

"Mabel! what in the world is the matter?" cried Mrs. Keith and her daughter.

"A great deal is the matter," said Mr. Grantley, an ill-concealed joyousness in his voice, while he watched Mabel as a cat watches a mouse. "A great deal, I can tell you. I have been nearly roasted in your room."

Mrs. Keith, always the most concerned of hostesses, went up to the fire, when her daughter gently but firmly turned her towards the door.

"Surely I might take off one of the logs," Mrs. Keith was heard espousing as the two were left together and alone—Francis Grantley comparing a pencil list of books, written out by Mabel, lying on the table, with an envelope on which were written her thanks—and Mabel, her hands before her eyes afraid to see in his what he thought of her.

In some more polite form he must be going to rudely break the waking dream which had followed the real one. "*Her Francis*" he could no longer be now. But what happened instead? He was kneeling at her feet, trying to remove her hands from before her face.

"Miss Talbot! Mabel! You dearest and sweetest"

His words ceased abruptly and he sprang up as the door opened and Helen looked cautiously in. When she entered the room followed by several visitors, Francis Grantley was its sole occupant.

He and Mabel had only had a second of time to look at each other, but during that second their hearts had mutely finished and answered those interrupted words.

V.

MABEL was in a tumult of joy. He did not think of her as her sensitive love had feared, but she was his "sweetest and dearest" The remainder she could fill up for herself. Had she not known "*her Francis*" before he had known her? Had she not seen that look of love on his face before?

When she returned to the sitting-room her joy received its first check. Francis Grantley was gone, but other visitors had come who

seemed to be all talking at once. Helen's words were the only ones out of which she could make any sense.

"How lucky that he left the telegram behind, otherwise we should have thought he had taken leave of his senses. I trust he will see his friend alive. He must, I think, have caught the Rome express. He certainly wasted no time in good-byes or explanations." Mabel caught Helen's eyes and the loving sympathy in them made her hide her face over the forgotten telegram which had become common property.

It was as Helen had said. Francis Grantley had been summoned to Rome to the deathbed of a friend, and a glance at her watch told her that he could no longer be in Florence.

For some days no news came from him. Helen thought it very strange, but as Mabel seemed only to think of his trouble, she kept her own thoughts to herself. Mabel, however, was only acting a part. As the days went by a small voice—a treacherous one it seemed to her—kept whispering that he ought to have found time to write—if only one word to complete those interrupted spoken ones. Then she would recall that glance which they had exchanged and her joy returned in full.

She would have found those days more difficult to pass through had she not been partly taken out of herself by the unexpected arrival of a dear friend on the evening of Mr. Grantley's departure. This was one Hugh Sedley, a young man some years her senior, who was engaged to be married to her favourite cousin, Charlotte Burns. He was one of those sunny faced, bright eyed people who, when they have troubles win the sympathy of others at once. His trouble was six months' delay of his marriage, and he could not have found a more sympathetic recipient of all his thoughts and feelings than Mabel was at that moment. She needed distraction and she felt so sorry for any sort of disappointment to be borne, that by the time she had done the honours of Florence to him all day and let him talk everlastinglly of Charlotte, they both felt their sorrows lightened.

Helen Keith, however, who was not in Hugh's confidence, felt a trouble grow within her the lighter theirs grew, but Mabel's natural reserve made it impossible for her even to hint at a danger which perhaps might be merely imagination. She could only try to keep them apart as much as possible, and she succeeded so far well that Mabel spent the greater part of Christmas Day with other friends. Towards evening she returned, and seeing Helen and Hugh Sedley talking over the fire, she went up to her room and sat in the dusk, glad of this moment of solitude with her own painful thoughts.

There must be some mistake! He must have written, and the letter had never been posted; or in that busy season had miscarried; and so perhaps he was blaming her too. That some news of him would reach her that day, she felt sure. He would never let it pass without a word of greeting to the Keiths.

At this moment Helen entered the room dressed for dinner. Mabel started up, thinking it must be late. Perhaps she had news for her.

"What are you doing there in the dark?" The suspiciousness in her voice made Helen force a laugh.

"No harm," replied Mabel. "I was having a sort of 'meditation among the tombs.'"

Helen's answer was to put her arm suddenly round Mabel.

"Why, Helen, what is it?" she asked, startled and uneasy at her action and then at her silence. "There is no bad news? Nothing from home?"

"No, nothing from your home. Indeed mamma herself received only one letter this morning. It was from Naples."

"From Naples," echoed Mabel a little faintly. "Who does she know there? Helen, speak! who is in Naples?" she repeated, a deadly chill creeping over her at her friend's ominous silence.

"Many people—Francis Grantley, for one."

"But he will be here to-morrow—or the next day?

"He said he did not know when he should return. Perhaps he might run over to Cairo or Algiers."

Cairo or Algiers or the other end of the world; it was all the same to Mabel Talbot.

Mabel never willingly recalled the hour which followed Helen's leaving the room until she started up and dressed herself in feverish haste. In that short time she seemed to have become some other Mabel Talbot, who would soon have to return to the home where she had passed more than twenty years of tranquil happiness, carrying with her a remembrance which she could ask no one to help her to bear. A remembrance that accident had thrown a coat in her way, that the Fates had willed that its owner should be named Francis, and that the said unlucky Mabel Talbot had scribbled a few words on the back of a letter. And that was all the story? No. Something more. She had taken falseness for truth. It was no dream, that scene that she had taken part in, and that Helen had been obliged to interrupt, and had therefore been a witness to. Yet was it unreal as a dream, for it had been an acted lie.

And the days went on.

One afternoon she was near the post-office, and was overtaken by a heavy shower. While she stood under the colonnades, Hugh Sedley suddenly rushed past her. He stopped short on seeing her.

"Oh, Mabel," he said breathlessly, "so awfully sorry you were not in. I read Lottie's last letter to Helen Keith. Lottie is the best girl in all the world. You don't half know what she is."

"I ought to do so," answered Mabel, smiling involuntarily, "for I have known her ever since she was born."

Hugh looked rather jealously at her, and then laughed.

"Well, never mind. I shall have her all to myself soon. But I must be off and post this to her. I'll come this evening and read you out what she says."

Mabel, still smiling, notwithstanding the trouble with which she fought night and day, went to see if the shower were over. Only a few drops were falling, so she set off. The narrow dark street into which she turned was unusually crowded with carts and carriages, and, engrossed with her own miserable thoughts, she never noticed until she was in the thick of them—for it had no footway—that she was in danger of being run over. Suddenly she felt herself seized and drawn back, but only just in time. She looked up to thank Hugh Sedley, as she expected, and found herself face to face with—Francis Grantley! But a Francis Grantley such as she had never seen, either in dreamland or in life, holding out a rigid arm for her to take, which might have been that of a statue insensible to human touch, so cold and expressionless did his face look.

The bitter suffering of the last weeks surged up in her brain and seemed to set it on fire as she saw the stony face of the man who had caused it. Had a thousand deaths been before her she would willingly have died them all sooner than accept the support he offered her. Without one word of thanks for saving the life that he had embittered for always, she turned and left him. Had she but looked back, she would have seen nothing stony about him then. Could he have been mistaken? What did that proud, pale face, those burning, indignant eyes mean?

"You have no umbrella," he said hoarsely, as he overtook her; "and another heavy shower is coming."

She darted under a near archway. He followed her leisurely and found her as far inside as she could go, her pale face and glowing eyes brought out in curious relief by the light of a lamp before a shrine in the opposite wall. Why did he not let her alone, she asked herself. What bitter mockery of her pain! To care nothing for breaking her heart, but much that a few drops of rain should fall upon her! She felt more than saw that he was examining her closely.

"You are changed, Miss Talbot," he said. "A few weeks ago a shower would not have struck you dumb."

Changed! Mabel would have forced herself to deny this had it not been for something in his tone. Had his voice trembled?

Her expression was less hard as she stammered out: "I was startled, surprised. I did not know that you were in Florence."

He leant towards her, and his words were low but very distinct.

"Why not say at once that my presence here is unwelcome to you?"

She changed colour, and her lips trembled a little.

"The rude suggestion was yours and not mine."

"At least confess," and he came a step nearer, "that you are disappointed that it was not Mr. Sedley who prevented your committing suicide—as you seemed clearly bent upon doing."

"Mr.—who?" asked Mabel, still not understanding what was in his mind, from sheer surprise at hearing the name on his lips.

"Yes, Mr. Sedley," he repeated. "Perhaps you are offended at my want of manners. Allow me to make amends, and congratulate you now, then."

Mabel never quite remembered what happened as she stood and listened to the few words which revealed to her the cause of his unaccountable conduct. It flashed across her for the first time that, after all, they had never been quite engaged, had never had a thorough explanation. Subsequent events, rumour, might easily have made him believe her to be engaged to Hugh Sedley, and that she had only been amusing herself with him! What could he have thought of her! But he still loved her! The rush of joy flooding her heart almost stifled her, and she rushed out into the rain.

He brought her back. "Why do you not thank me for my congratulations?" he asked.

"Because I don't happen to be the woman that he is going to marry."

"Who is, then?"

"My cousin—Charlotte Burns."

He staggered against the wall as white as death. "Great heavens! What lies people tell! Mabel, if you saw a fellow creature starving you *could* not hold food to his lips and then draw it away again?"

"I have spoken the truth."

"And yet you spent all your time with him until report gave him to you as your affianced husband?"

"I gave him my time and my sympathy, as I would have given them to my own brothers. He is almost a brother to me."

A deep sob shook him from head to foot. Mabel crept nearer to him, and the next few words were spoken with both her hands in his. "Mabel, listen. When I was forced to leave you without even a word of farewell, I meant to return immediately, but my poor friend lingered—and died; and even before then those lying tongues dealt me a death-blow. Mabel, if you ever had any love for me, tell me. It may not be too late for me to win it back."

And as he stooped his head to catch her whispered words, he heard her say that she had always loved him, even when she had tried to forget him—always—even before she had known him.

"Mabel," he said, a little hesitatingly when they were indoors. "I want you to do something for me—if only for once?"

"What can it possibly be—*Frank?*" she said in a very small voice, and blushing rosy red.

He smiled at her answer, yet a sigh of relief escaped him, making him feel rather foolish. He looked down at her and she looked up, and then they both laughed.

THE FABRIC OF A VISION.

EVERYONE but Edward and myself looked on our marriage as a misfortune.

To be sure we were the persons most interested, and to us it seemed the most desirable thing in the world. My father and mother did not like the match from the first, though Edward had arranged to stay in Australia for two years, at any rate. Edward was not strong; indeed he had come out for his health; and beyond the fact that his introductory letters were all that such things should be, we knew nothing of him. I knew more than the others, certainly; for I knew that I should be happy with him anywhere, even in England, and that the dearest duty of my life would be to take a wife's care of him.

We had taken a house at Glenelg and there we were to live an ideal life, till Edward grew quite strong, when we were to go to England. Edward was an only son, and Mr. Norreys, his father, was rich: so, as he said, our future was tolerably secure.

So much for intentions.

We had not been married a week when a telegram came to say that old Mr. Norreys was dead, and we left Adelaide by the next homeward-bound steamer.

It was terrible for him. I had my own selfish trouble too, in being so suddenly rooted up out of the old familiar soil of home love. But we were all in all to each other, the voyage did him a great deal of good, and my heartache was wearing itself out by the time we landed at Gravesend.

Of London I did not have a cheerful experience. It was June when we got there, and the dirty old Babylon was as smoky, as hot, and altogether as unpleasant as I had ever imagined it. Of its "sights" I saw none, except the dingy hotel sitting-room where I spent my days, while Edward was busy among lawyers in Lincoln's Inn, or at the rooms in the Albany, where his father had died. I had nothing to do all day but to worry myself, and fancy that Edward was looking ill again, and consequently was more than glad when some cousins of his at Carlisle wrote and asked us to come down to visit them. Edward at first did not want to go, but when he saw it would please me, he consented.

We left London on the first of July. It was a lovely morning. How delicious it was to get away into the clear country air, and receive my first glimpse of English country! It charmed me; but railway travelling always affects me in one way: before I can quite realise that I don't want to talk, I fall asleep. I did so now. When I awoke, Edward was speaking:

"Wake up, Mary," he was saying. "You're very tired and so am I.

We're coming to a very pretty place, and I mean to get out here and stay till to-morrow. You'll be done up before we get to Carlisle, if we push on to-day."

"What nonsense," I returned, instinctively putting my hair to rights, as a woman always does when she wakes up after a travelling nap. "I always sleep in trains. You don't know all my bad ways yet."

"I know your way of making yourself a willing martyr to other people's plans," laughed Edward; "but I want to stop here, if you'll permit it. In fact I can't go on.—The noise of this train shakes my head all to pieces."

"Don't you think," I ventured, "as we've got the tickets—and they expect us ——"

"Oh, hang the tickets," laughed my husband, beginning to get down hat-box, rugs and bags, from the netting overhead. "I've a strong fancy for seeing this place again—an overwhelming fancy for your seeing it. My dear Mary, I always have my own way—you know that."

It was quite true. His own way was generally as good a way as any other, I must admit, and Calverley—the place we stopped at—proved quite as pretty as he said it was. Certainly there was a factory at one end of the little town, but it did not spoil anything of the picturesqueness of the place. Only the river that ran through was not clear and bright as rivers should be, but dark and foul—and its very foam, where its path was made difficult with stones, was not white but yellow.

The factory itself was not ugly. It was large and white; not one big block, but a number of scattered buildings grouped irregularly round a big reservoir. This was walled round, and the strip of earth between wall and water was covered with long grass, aflame with great scarlet poppies. In the middle of the water was an island, just big enough to support a large pigeon cote, where the grey and brown and white birds flew in and out all day long, circling over the glassy water till it, like the air, seemed alive with the white shimmer of their wings. There was a wooded hill behind the "works," and to the left stretched the slate roofs of the town, under whose stone bridge the river flowed tumultuously.

There was nothing like this near Adelaide. The novelty of it all was bewildering. I saw so much, and heard so much during the afternoon, that I was fit for nothing in the evening but to lie on a very hard sofa trying to read an old railway novel. Edward said he would take a turn with a cigar—and I had a very dull time of it indeed.

It was a lovely evening. I could not wonder that Edward stayed out to enjoy it. But when the sun had gone redly down, when the gold and crimson after-glow had faded to faintest primrose and coral, and when at last the moon showed clearly in the deepening blue of the sky, I did think it was time he came back. It was half-past ten when he did come.

"All in the dark?" he asked. "Why didn't you ring for lights?"

His voice seemed to shake a little as he threw himself into an arm chair at the other end of the room.

"What's the matter?" I said. "I am afraid you've overtired yourself, Edward. I wish I had gone with you."

"Yes, that's just what it is," he replied, hurriedly. "I am overtired, and I feel quite faint. Just ring, Mary, will you?"

I rang; and he ordered some champagne, whereat I was rather astonished, for he rarely took anything after dinner.

"We both seem rather dull," he said, explanatorily, as the man left the room. "It's my fault for having been away from you so long. I was an idiot to go out. I can't get on without my wife."

"Then I wonder you *did* stop out so long," I said. "You could have come back ages before, if you had wanted to do so."

"I lost my way," he replied, "and went further than I intended."

Then the waiter came in with the champagne and glasses and two tall candles on a tray.

By the light from these last I thought Edward looked very, very tired. I dislike champagne and would not have any, and he went on drinking glass after glass and talking in a rather inconsequent way till the bottle was finished.

I was rather cross at having been alone all the evening, perhaps: and perhaps his London business had tired him as much as his walk; but there was a cloud between us, the first since our marriage. Until now there had always been between us such a perfect sympathy and rapport. He seemed far off from me as he sat there, talking. I felt sure that all that champagne could not be good for him.

That night—I suppose about two o'clock—I woke to find myself sitting up in bed, trembling with horror, my heart beating tumultuously.

"What is it?" said Edward, in a very wide-awake voice. "Whatever is the matter, Mary?"

"I have had such a horrible dream!" I replied, as soon as I could steady my voice. "Did I say anything, Edward?"

"No: you only gave a blood-curdling scream. What was your dream about?"

"Oh—it was a nightmare," I said, lying back on the pillow and holding my heart with both hands. "I don't want to talk about it. Did I wake you?"

"No, I've not been asleep. Don't throw your arms up again, Mary, but try and go to sleep. You won't dream it again, that's certain: nightmares never come twice."

I closed my eyes obediently, but only to conjure up again and again the picture that dream had shown me. This is what I saw over and over again, through the hot, still, moon-white hours:—

First a broad grassy field, through which ran a dark smooth stream. There was a wooden bridge over it, and just below this the river ran over a shelving ledge of rock and went smoothly down in an unbroken

sheet. Then it broke into yellow foam and hurried on. It looked deep. There was a wood behind me ; just before me was a footpath. I saw everything in the clear moonlight. Along the footpath came presently two figures, and one of them was a figure I knew. It was Edward ; looking strange, in some indefinable way—but still Edward unmistakably. Walking about a yard from him was a girl, dressed in a muslin gown. Her head was bare, and in her hand she held a white sun bonnet. At the end of the bridge they stood still and faced each other, and the girl's face was turned towards me. It was a pale face, with red lips and a high nose. A high-bred uncommon-looking face. The head was set well on the shoulders, and the rounded figure was thrown back in an attitude of defiance.

"Never," she said, and her big eyes flashed in the moonlight ; "you've deceived me too often. I'll never see you again. Why did you not marry me when you had the chance ?"

"I wish I had. Oh, Winifred, come to me ; it is not too late yet. You see I couldn't keep away from here," and he held out his hands to her.

Then their voices sank till I could only hear a vague murmur. Then her voice rang out again, clear and sharp :

"No, Mr. Norreys ; I tell you, *no!* There are other men in the world—ay, and in Calverley too—who have better and higher notions of keeping faith than you have."

"Do you mean that you'll marry one of them ?" he said.

"Yes, and you will soon know how sincerely I mean it."

"Then, by heaven, he shall marry a ghost !" Edward cried, and caught her in his arms. There was a sudden splash—a choked cry—and something white went over the shelving wall down those seven feet into the smooth brown water.

Then came the crowning horror of the dream. He turned round with a look on his face of such fear and agony as I have never seen before. I knew that the girl was drowned. And I seemed to tear my way through wood and bramble back into consciousness, and into that still bedroom at the Calverley Arms.

Why did I not tell my husband what I had dreamed ? Well, in those first moments of waking, so vivid, so utterly real and life-like had been that vision that I felt that to tell him the dream would be like charging him with the deed. I wished he had remained with me last evening. And why had he wanted so much to stay at Calverley, and why had he seemed so strange when he came in ? I stopped these questions resolutely. Why should I try to connect Edward's actions with that idiotic nightmare ? And then I fell to thinking of all I had ever heard of dreams that had come true, and wondering whether other prophetic dreams were half as real-seeming as this one of mine, to which no importance was to be attached. And the east quickened, and the birds woke. I turned and looked at my husband by the chill light. He was asleep—looking very tired and

anxious, but with no change on his face such as —— But what was I thinking about?"

Then came common sense, and whispered : " You little simpleton, you don't deserve so good a husband. Your love is a bad sentry if it cannot keep out such midsummer madness as this."

By the time the full sun-light had filled the room I was almost ready to laugh at myself for thinking twice about such nonsense ; but I was, all the same, so much ashamed of the vague imaginings that dream had engendered, that I would not for worlds have told Edward a word about it.

" I'm afraid I was rather growly last night," said Edward at breakfast ; " but I really was quite knocked up with my long walk."

" I was disgracefully cross, myself," I admitted, handing him his coffee, " but I missed you so all the evening. Long separations don't seem to agree with either of us."

" What do you say to sauntering about a little in these parts before we go on to Carlisle, Mary ? It's a very pretty country and it's much nicer being by ourselves than with anyone else."

" Of course it is," I admitted ; " but, my dear Edward, we have written to the Westlakes to say we're coming."

" Then write again and say long railway journeys don't agree with me, and that we can only reach them by easy stages. And as I haven't half explored Calverley yet, shall we stay here a day or two ? This seems a nice, comfortable hotel."

" Oh no," I answered with a shudder ; " let us get out of this. A little of Caverley goes a long way." And so it happened that the same day found us at the Royal Hart, Branscombe.

The Royal Hart, Branscombe, was a magnificent model of all that an inn ought not to be. The landlord and servants seemed alike to look upon the guests as personal enemies, to be harassed, worried, and made miserable by every means in their power.

But in spite of all discomforts I spent a much pleasanter evening than at the well-appointed " Calverley Arms." Edward seemed quite himself again, and I myself felt in my usual spirits. This sudden scheme of rambling through the pleasant district of mid-England, in the height of summer, was delightful to me. It would be like a wedding tour, a second honeymoon, I said.

We wandered about in the woods all the evening, and I was so tired that I dropped asleep directly my head touched the pillow.

How long had I been asleep ? I woke, shivering with fear. For, incredible as it may seem, the terrible experience of the night before had been repeated, to every smallest detail. Again the river, the bridge, the lovers, the sudden splash and cry, and then the face of my husband turned towards me with that frantic horror on it !

This time I did not cry out, only drew my breath quickly and lay rigid, unable to move or speak, though I knew, somehow, that Edward was awake.

"Now then, Mary," he said tenderly. "Nightmares again? What a start you gave!"

His voice broke the spell. "Oh dear," I said, "I don't think travelling agrees with me. I never had such dreams before."

And then I lay silent, thinking how strangely that first dream must have affected me, for it to have reproduced itself thus exactly. I couldn't tell Edward *now* about it, because he would wonder so why I hadn't told him yesterday. So I held my tongue, and when I had listened for some time to the regular breathing that told me he was asleep, I too, dropped into unconsciousness: an unconsciousness which was broken by no more dreams.

For the next week we wandered about from one charming spot to another. "Where are your roses?" said my husband, one morning. "They don't seem to flourish in this English air."

They did not, indeed. Though I was young, though my husband seemed to adore me, though we were spending our days in the loveliest English country, I was beginning to feel that my life was hardly worth having. Most of us have had the same dream twice over; but, reader, has it ever happened to you to dream the same dream, and that a horror too deep for description, for seven consecutive nights?

That is what had befallen me. That was what was driving the colour from my cheeks and the light from my eyes. Every night I met this vision; every night I woke, feeling as if it were all true; every morning the relief of daylight was less, and the sense of misery—and misery not without reason—was stronger. I simply could not tell Edward, just *because* I suffered so; and after the first two nights I did not even tell him I had been dreaming—though he was never asleep when I woke.

On the eighth day we reached Annersley. The inn was full of excursionists, and the only rooms we could get were two tiny apartments, with the width of the house between them. I felt a little uneasy when I went to bed. My nerves were beginning to suffer from the strain of this nightly terror. How should I feel when I woke, as—as I knew I should—with that vision still before my eyes—in that little room alone? I did not like to think of it.

When I awoke, the whole room was full of the strong sunlight that streamed through the uncurtained window. I had had a fair, full, perfect night of sleep. The enchantment was over. The spell was broken. *The dream had not come.*

Oh, the relief of that waking. To feel that the torture was over, that the vision, with its maddening air of reality, had ceased to visit me! I went downstairs humming a tune.

"What a lovely day—what a pretty place," I said to Edward. Everything seemed rose-coloured to me.

"You're looking like yourself again," he returned. "Shall we stay here another day, Mary?"

"Oh, yes," I said eagerly. That was a happy day!

In the evening we were sitting at the end of the inn garden. It was an intensely still evening; still with the hush that comes before a storm; the sort of hush that makes people say there is electricity in the air. There were green trees in the garden, and long grass—and under a grey old lichen-covered apple tree was the wooden seat on which we were sitting. The birds were quite silent, and into our talk a silence came presently, as on such evenings silences do come. I slipped my hand into my husband's, and we sat there quietly. I was utterly at peace, and filled with a sense of rest and contentment such as I had not known since we left Australia. There is nothing in the world so delicious as silence—where there is perfect sympathy.

I did not fall asleep. No; I am quite sure of that. There was no half-conscious interval—no drowsy interlude. Straight from that fair inn garden which had seemed to me like a little paradise, I was taken back to my dream-spot, that wood by the river. Presently the two figures came along again, and the old scene was enacted with that terrible newness that had characterized its every representation. I never knew—as one does sometimes—that I had seen it before. It always had a horrible unexpectedness about it. It was only when I woke that the knowledge of *how often* I had seen it used to come upon me, and add to the tortures I had to bear.

After the climax, I found myself in the garden seat, Edward's hand in mine, and such a deadly sensation of weakness, exhaustion, and utter prostration, as I had never felt in all my healthy life. When I spoke, my voice sounded like some one else's.

"Edward—I am tired. Let us go in."

"All right," he answered. "Why—what's the matter, Mary? You look like a little ghost!"

"I'm tired of moving about. I cannot keep it up. Let us go on to the Westlakes."

"Very well. You certainly are not looking yourself, and I shall take you to a doctor directly we reach Carlisle. I must take care of my Australian lily."

"Shall I write to-night?" I said, eager for any change.

"Yes, if you like! Why, what a miserable little face! You're soon tired of your second honeymoon, Mary!"

"It isn't that," I said feebly, cut to the heart by this reproach. Was it my fancy, or had his voice altered, as well as his face, in this last week. "It isn't that; but I do feel ill, Edward, and I think I should like to see a doctor."

And I went indoors to write my letter to the Westlakes.

Having written it, I sat by the open window waiting for Edward to come in from the garden and tell me the exact address. I sat scribbling on an odd half-sheet of paper. I have some little skill at catching likenesses—and presently a very fair sketch of my husband's face lay before me. Then the busy pen went on scratching, guided, I do believe, by the Imp of the Perverse, and a companion portrait appeared.

A girl with a handsome face, and head thrown back defiantly. I was touching up the lines of the shoulder and neck, when the window was darkened by Edward, who, leaning through the roses and ivy, took the paper from my hand.

"Who are you caricaturing now?" he said. "You really ——"

He stopped short. Was that look on his face not a faint reflex of the dream-look?

"Who is this?" he asked in quite an altered tone.

A strange sinking at my heart kept me silent for a minute. Then I said in almost as constrained a voice as his:

"Only a fancy head. I don't know why I drew it?"

Did he know I was not telling him the exact truth? He said no more, only his hand trembled as he picked up the letter I had written, and read it through.

No vision came to me that night, for I never closed my eyes. That look of my husband's, when he saw the "fancy head" was infinitely more terrible to me than all that gone before. For it was *real*, at least, whatever the dream scene might be; and one fact it established beyond doubt: Winifred was not unknown to him. There was such a person. And what a light this threw on his conduct! His staying at Calverley—his going out—everything, in fact, that had happened there, now bore a fresh and fearful interpretation. Oh, what an eternity of agony can be compressed into one short summer night!

Calverley was the nearest main line station, and thither we returned next day. The journey was made hateful by the sense of *apartness*, which must be felt before the misery of it can be even imagined. We just missed the Carlisle train we went for; the next did not pass through till ten o'clock, so we had to spend six hours at Calverley. I never saw Edward so annoyed. He vowed vengeance against all the officials, at the trains, at the time-tables, and at what he called our bad luck. I had never seen him really angry and my doing so now did not tend to make matters more pleasant between us.

"I suppose we must go to the hotel," he said, when his anger showed signs of giving out. "We can't spend half-a-dozen hours on this confounded platform."

I shuddered when I saw again the place where first my trouble had come upon me.

We had dinner. I don't think either of us eat much—and then I said: "I am going out, Edward."

"Do you wish to go alone?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"I don't feel disposed to go out," he went on, "and you had better not overtake yourself."

"I must go, Edward," I said. "I feel that I cannot stay in the house."

My going out was not a mere caprice. I felt that the clue to that dream-tragedy was to be found at Calverley. Edward's unusual anger

had settled that point, and I was determined to make use of this delay which had been forced upon us, walk through and round the place, in the effort to find out something. So out I went. At the door Edward overtook me.

"I don't like your walking alone, Mary," he said. "We ought to keep together."

"*You* went out alone the last time we were here," I replied, trying to force a laugh, "but I've no objection to your coming with me."

So we walked down the High Street silently, and a little apart.

"Where are you wandering?" he asked by-and-by.

"I want to see the waterfall by the wooden bridge," I answered, almost involuntarily, looking down as I spoke.

"How do you know there's a wooden bridge here at all?"

"Didn't you tell me so?"

"No—" very curtly.

"Ah!" with a fine affectation of indifference. "I suppose I must have dreamt it ——"

"Did you dream the way there as well?"

"No, but I'll ask it of this man," and I went up to a passing labourer. "Can you tell me whether there is a wooden bridge over the river, near a waterfall?"

I had felt irresistibly impelled to ask the question, but I was hardly prepared for the answer.

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Go straight through the town, and then turn over the stile into the Meads, and follow the path. You can't miss it."

We walked on. The silence presently became unbearable, and we plunged into such talk as goes on between mere acquaintances; talk characterised by a terrible politeness. My heart was aching at it all. What was in *his* heart? I would not let myself wonder.

We found the Meads, and over the stile we went. In a moment I knew that the scene, at least, of my dream was real, for the whole picture was before me exactly as I had seen it. Then I stopped short, and turned to my husband.

"Come," I said, "and stand by the bridge at that corner."

My mind was made up. Even if eternal parting were to follow, I would tell him now what was in my mind. I would say—Here are all as I saw them before—bridge, wood, path, water—and you: where is the girl?

"Come, Edward," I repeated, "and stand as I tell you."

"What nonsense," he said; "have you gone mad, Mary?"

"Heaven knows: perhaps I have; but stand there you must."

"Anything to humour you," he answered. His face was white and set; his lips were closed tightly. In his eyes was a sort of bewildered misery, the look of one who receives a blow from a hand he loves, and cannot either understand or resent it.

Suddenly, before I could begin my tale or ask my question, his whole face changed—grew glad—the look of misery vanished—fled

away. Nay, more. The tired, troubled look, the shadow that had darkened it for the last ten days, was gone. I followed the direction of his eyes.

Merciful heaven ! Was this another dream ? Was it all a dream ? Coming along the path, as I had seen them before, were two figures. The girl whose face I had sketched, and, beside her—not Edward ; *he* was standing close to me—but Edward's face, his figure, his walk. Was it Edward's ghost ? Was Edward right, and had I gone mad ? Was that what it had all driven me to ? They drew nearer. Then my husband sprang towards the other Edward, who made an answering movement, and their right hands clasped each other fast.

I saw nothing more. I suppose I fainted.

When I came to myself I was on that same sofa in the Calverley Arms which has been mentioned before. Bending over me was the face that had so haunted and tortured me.

"This is our future sister-in-law," said Edward presently, "and my brother is waiting to see you, as soon as you are well enough. It's all right ; we'll explain things presently, Mary."

"I didn't know you had a brother," I returned, faintly.

"Oh well, I have, you see. Will, come and speak to my wife."

That night Edward and I made mutual confession, and in bitterest shame and humiliation, I sobbed out all my story. Then Edward told his tale, and I learned that his brother, William Norreys, had been a ne'er-do-well, and such a disgrace to the family that Edward had chosen not to mention him. It was a little weak of him, was it not, to think my love for him could be changed by his having a good-for-nothing twin brother ? His wish to stop at Calverley, he could not explain ; it was an impulse for which he could not account. When he went out that first evening he had witnessed that scene between Winifred and his brother, just as I had dreamed it. The horror of the whole thing had completely unmanned him, and, without waiting to try and rescue the girl, he had turned and torn his way through the brambles and woody undergrowth (ah, I knew what that felt like). He had felt that he had been a coward, and that, almost as much as the other reasons, had kept him from telling me.

Had his manhood stood him good another half minute, he would have seen his brother rush down stream, dash in, and bring the girl to the bank, and then all this agony would have been spared us both. He would never have thought his brother was a murderer, and I should never have believed—ah, don't ask me *what*.

All the same you are not to suppose that *I* consider Edward a coward ; that was only his way of putting it. It was simply his physical weakness that was to blame; you know he was never strong. Can you wonder that in the relief of knowing that his brother was innocent, my husband should have forgotten and forgiven all old scenes, and have sprung forward to greet him ?

Poor Will ! his mad jealousy, in pushing Winifred into the stream had really been the best advocate of his cause. He very effectually persuaded her of the sincerity of his passion, at any rate, and I believe their betrothal was settled before they had been out of the water three minutes.

The history of their love does not concern this story. William Norreys was clerk in the factory above mentioned : and this girl was governess in the house of the chief partner, and able to grace her husband's position, when soon after, by the means of substantial help from my husband, he became third partner in the firm.

William was only so *very* like Edward by *moonlight*. In the day-time he does not look nearly so handsome.

And how about my dream ? There is very little to tell. I only learned that every time this vision had come to me, my husband had been widely, vividly awake, and had had the whole scene intensely present before his mind. Not an explanation ? No, I suppose not. Yet one hears now-a-days of all sorts of thought-reading, though my only experience of it took place years ago, before it became fashionable.

FABIAN BLAND.



MY PICTURE GALLERY.

"Tis no oaken panelled room with art treasures hung,
Lovely fabled haunts whose charms olden poets sung ;
Quaintly robed and powdered dames fitly set in antique frames.

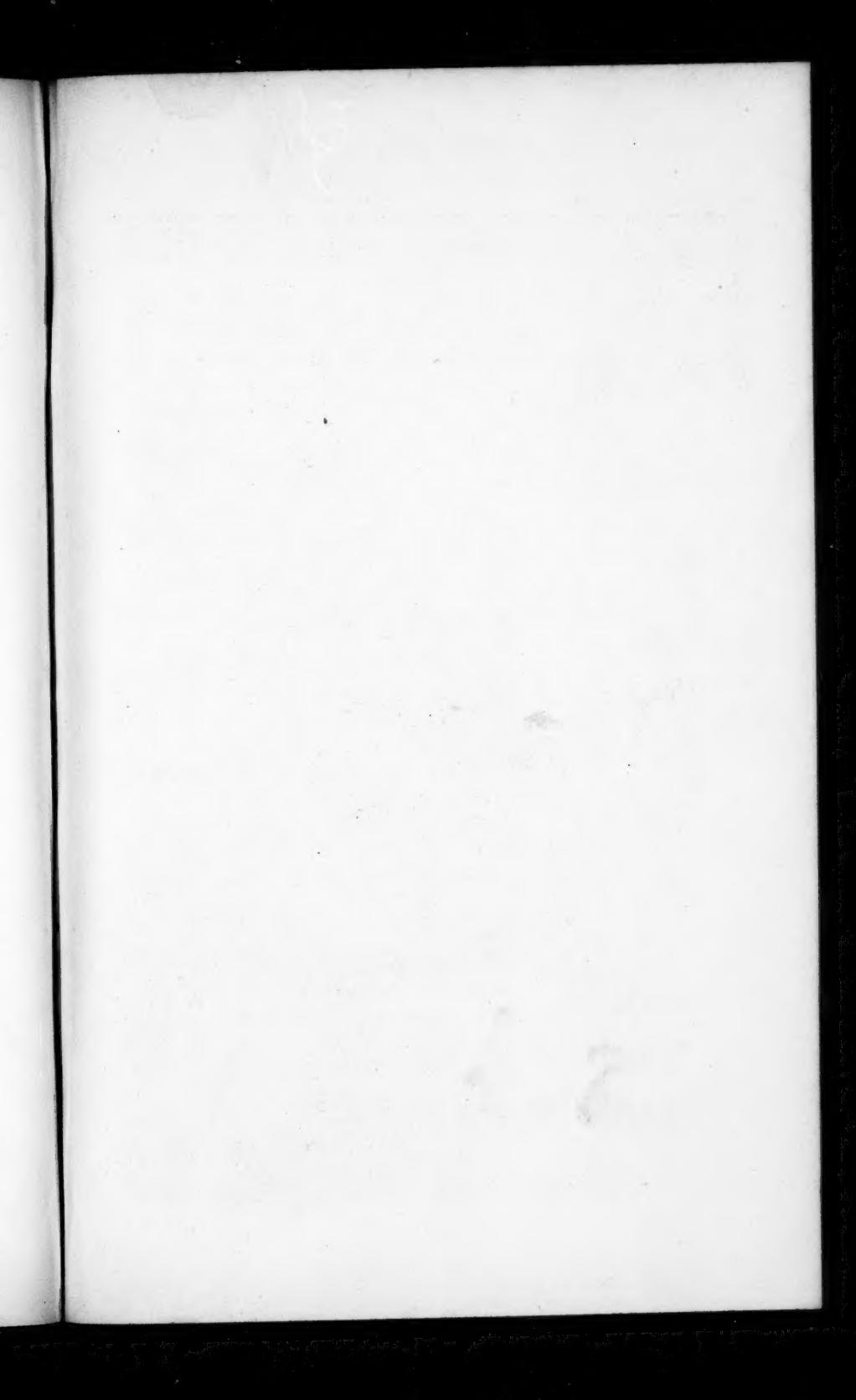
Painted shepherds tend no flocks 'mid arcadian bowers,
Nor with mimic wreath and lyre smile away the hours :
One fair landscape, one alone, only can I call my own.

"Tis a cottage vine-festooned, on a rising ground,
Leafy woodlands shadow it, roses bloom around ;
Clear and bright its streamlets run, dimpling, sparkling, in the sun.

There my happy youth was spent, there my childhood played,
When sweet ties and kindred hearts earth an Eden made :
Memory is the golden key of love's picture gallery.

Portraits line its silent walls, each one in its place,
And the true and tender eyes of each angel face
That has looked its last below, follow me where'er I go.

Earthly sunbeams pass it by, never down it shine,
Yet to me each picture glows with a light divine,
As I tread its lonely floor, enter its enchanted door. J. I. L.



R. AND E. TAYLOR.

To see him take it like this, frightened her more than all.

Mrs. ELLEN STAPLES.

